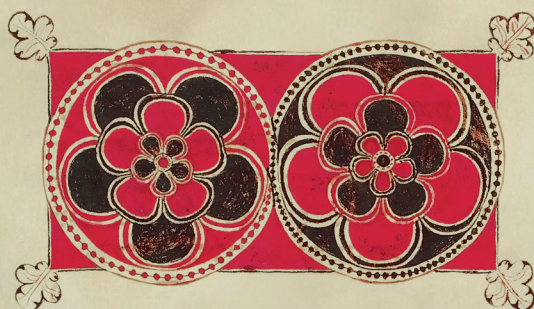
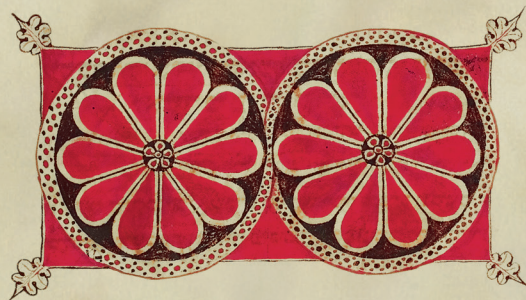




*Authenticating
Criteria in Jesus Research
and Beyond*

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGY



KEVIN B. BURR

BRILL

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Biblical Interpretation Series

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Authenticating Criteria in Jesus Research and Beyond

An Interdisciplinary Methodology

By

Kevin B. Burr



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Abbreviations

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
<i>ABRL</i>	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>AGJU</i>	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>AW</i>	<i>Antike Welt</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CAH</i>	Cambridge Ancient History
<i>CBET</i>	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CCTC</i>	Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries
<i>ClQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>ConBNT</i>	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
<i>CSR</i>	<i>Christian Scholar's Review</i>
<i>DJG²</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. 2nd ed. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013.
<i>EHJ</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus</i> . Edited by Craig A. Evans. New York: Routledge, 2008.
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>Historia</i>	<i>Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte</i>
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregoriannum</i>
<i>HSHJ</i>	<i>Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i> . Edited by Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde teologiese studies</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
<i>Mnemosyne</i>	<i>Mnemosyne: A Journal of Classical Studies</i>
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
<i>RCT</i>	<i>Revista catalana de teología</i>
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älten Kirche</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Decades of Discussion on Authenticating Criteria in Historical Jesus Research

At the turn of the millennium Stanley Porter observed “more books on the [historical Jesus] are being written all of the time and there is no perceivable sense of this trend abating.”¹ Almost two decades later it can be said Porter was a great prognosticator; new and revised books on the historical Jesus (and even expansions of revisions²) flood the SBL book exhibit annually. To this prodigious corpus can be added countless articles, podcasts and blog posts,³ and even an entire academic journal.⁴ There is no risk of overstatement to say the amount of research on the historical Jesus is truly staggering. But what sort of fruit has this labor produced? Sensing a disturbance in the force of Jesus research and its conclusions, James Charlesworth posed virtually the same question over a decade ago:

It is important to evaluate the present state of research since what had been perceived to be a developing consensus in the 1980s *has collapsed into a chaos of opinions*. Jesus cannot be a marginal Jew (Meier)

- 1 Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*, JSNTSup 191 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 17. Writing one year earlier, Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ix, also notes the hundreds of books written by scholars as well as the thousands written by non-scholars. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight, eds., *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 10 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), xi, make the same point, “[The quest for the historical Jesus] has absorbed countless hours of study and reflection and the books and articles devoted to it have consumed several forests.”
- 2 See, e.g., the most recent edition of one of the standard works on the gospels’ genre: Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 25th Anniversary Edition, (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2018). Although technically not dealing with the historical Jesus, the study of the gospels’ genre has clear and obvious implications for the historical study of Jesus.
- 3 Podcasts from Mark Goodacre (<http://podacre.blogspot.com>) and Phil Harland (<http://www.philipharland.com/Blog/religions-of-the-ancient-mediterranean-podcast-collection-page>), and others are available online and through various online venues.
- 4 Robert L. Webb, “On Finding a Home for Historical Jesus Discussion: An Invitation to the Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus,” *JSHJ* 1.1 (2003): 3–5. Webb remarks, “Specifically, this journal provides a focused forum for the academic discussion of Jesus within the context of first-century Palestine” (4).

and a Cynic (Crossan). Jesus cannot be closely linked with the Essenes (Venturini, Graetz, and Kohler) and a Jew significantly influenced by Pharisaism (Flusser). Jesus cannot be deeply influenced by apocalyptic eschatology (Sanders) and also announce a message that is fundamentally non-eschatological (Borg). Such conclusions are not compatible. How can such divergent views be possible when *all scholars employ a disinterested scientific methodology*?⁵

The disparate and incompatible “historical Jesuses” Charlesworth saw then haunt the discipline to this day. The question of Jesus research’s output thus remains: what have we learned?

Perhaps Jesus researchers have learned as much about ourselves as we have learned about Jesus, for one clear result of all this production is that many scholars have turned inwardly and engaged in much-needed methodological introspection. Working within Charlesworth’s time frame above, during the last three and a half decades of Jesus research the discussion concerning historiographic method has increased at an extraordinary pace.⁶ Charlesworth was

5 James H. Charlesworth, “Why Evaluate Twenty-Five Years of Jesus Research?,” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective. The First Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorný, Princeton-Prague Symposia Series on the Historical Jesus 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 1–15, at 1 (my emphasis). The incompatible conclusions in Jesus research have also been noticed by John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), xxvii. The late John Meier recognized much the same complaint several years earlier in *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 5 vols., ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2016) (abbreviated in the notes as *Marginal Jew*). In his concluding remarks about the proposed criterion of historical presumption, which Meier believes is more akin to the “argument to the best explanation,” he states “A review of a representative sample of books on the historical Jesus shows that exegetes of every stripe claim that they have found the true coherent explanation that illuminates all the facts about Jesus: he was an apocalyptic fanatic (Albert Schweitzer), a rabbi and a prophet who issued the call to existential decision (Rudolph Bultmann), a gay antinomian magician (Morton Smith), a catalyst of nonviolent social revolution (Richard A. Horsley), or a charismatic man of the Spirit who founded a revitalization movement (Marcus J. Borg)—to name but a few ‘necessary explanations,’” (1:194n.66). Compare similar statements in Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1–5, and Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 4–5. In this case, Fredriksen observes, less is more: “The paperbacks [on the historical Jesus] proliferate as the range of the portraits broadens. If this is progress, we might wish for less of it” (4).

6 One can refer to the several studies below for comments specifically regarding the criteria of authenticity, the primary focus of this monograph. The list below is arranged in chronological order, and these particular studies were chosen because they either a) fall within the time frame Charlesworth demarcated in his essay “Why Evaluate ...?” or b) bring us up to the present day: Dennis Polkow, “Method and Criteria for Historical Jesus Research,” SBLSP 26

right to underscore the “disinterested scientific methodology,” for not a few scholars hold our once-trusted methods responsible for the confusing myriad of historical Jesuses. As former methods are no longer assumed, or assumed

(Atlanta: SBL Press, 1987), 336–56; Eugene Boring, “The Historical-Critical Method’s ‘Criteria of Authenticity’: The Beatitudes in Q and Thomas as a Test Case,” in *The Historical Jesus and the Rejected Gospels*, Semeia Studies 44 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 9–44; Craig A. Evans, “Authenticity Criteria in the Life of Jesus Research,” *CSR* 19 (1989): 6–31; E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989); Meier, *Marginal Jew*; E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Press, 1993); Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism and the Matthean Community*, ConBNT 24 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994); Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, AGJU 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Gerd Theissen, “Historical Scepticism and the Criteria of Jesus Research or My Attempt to Leap Across Lessing’s Yawning Gulf,” *SJT* 49 (1996): 147–76; Benedict Viviano, “The Historical Jesus in the Doubly Attested Sayings: An Experiment,” *RB* 103 (1996): 367–410; Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998); Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel*, SNTSMS 102 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Halvor Moxnes, “The Historical Jesus: From Master Narrative to Cultural Context,” *BTB* 28.4 (1998): 135–49; Jack T. Sanders, “The Criterion of Coherence and the Randomness of Charisma: Poring Through Some Apories in the Jesus Tradition,” *NTS* 44.1 (1998): 1–25; Tom Holmén, “Doubts About Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the Main Criterion of Jesus-of-History Research,” in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, NTS 28.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 47–80; Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*; Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. Eugene Boring (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Stanley E. Porter, “Luke 17.11–19 and the Criteria for Authenticity Revisited,” *JSHJ* 1.2 (2003): 201–24; Richard N. Longenecker, “Literary Criteria in Life of Jesus Research,” in *The History of the Quest: Classical Studies and Critical Questions*, ed. Craig A. Evans, vol. 1 of *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 451–64; Hyeon Woo Shin, *Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem in Historical Jesus Research: The Search for Valid Criteria*, CBET 36 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); Michael F. Bird, “The Criterion of Greek Language and Context: A Response to Stanley E. Porter,” *JSHJ* 4.1 (2006): 55–67; idem, “The Criterion of Greek Language and Its Context: A Further Response,” *JSHJ* 4.1 (2006): 69–74; Tom Holmén, “Authenticity Criteria,” *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Craig A. Evans (New York: Routledge, 2008), 44–54; idem, “Seven Theses on the So-Called Criteria of Authenticity of Historical Jesus Research,” *RCT* 33.2 (2008): 343–76; Stanley E. Porter, “A Dead End or New Beginning? Examining the Criteria for Authenticity in Light of Albert Schweitzer,” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 16–35; Rafael Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria: The Use and Misuse of a Critical Method,” *JSHJ* 7.2 (2009): 152–67; Robert L. Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, WUNT 1/247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 9–93; Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); idem, “How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity,” in *HSHJ*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3–30; Stanley E. Porter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” *DJG* 2, 153–62; Tom Holmén, “Historical Method for Historical Jesus Research: Pragmatism, Common Sense, and Idiosyncrasy,” in *Jesus, Quo Vadis? Entwicklungen und Perspektiven der aktuellen Jesusforschung*, ed. E. D. Schmidt

now to be obsolete, the harshest critiques have been leveled at the criteria of authenticity, with some rejecting them forcefully and completely.⁷

That the aforementioned methodology is “scientific” indicates something important about the nature of the work we perceive ourselves to be doing: in the particular sub-discipline of biblical studies known as Jesus research, we operate as historians, in many ways similar, for example, to how a modern historian of Greco-Roman antiquity writes on the words and deeds attributed to Julius Caesar. However, many Jesus researchers—if not most—were trained primarily and predominantly in biblical exegesis, not history.⁸ Laying aside the implications stemming from incongruities between training and practice for the moment, historians of Jesus and the Gospels quite confidently employed the criteria of authenticity as the major—if not primary—methodological cornerstone of their historiographic method for decades. But a growing consensus oppose the criteria, blame the criteria for “such divergent views” on the historical Jesus, and happily claim to have moved past the criteria. Revisiting the criteria’s utility sometime after their (apparent) demise may be fruitless, but the issue of critical method is too important to leave any consensus unquestioned. It is therefore worth reexamining the criteria to see if, perhaps, some historical Jesus scholars have thrown out the proverbial baby with the bath water.

My goal for this study, then, is to engage in four interrelated analyses, two general and two specific. This process will comprise the first four chapters. In Chapter 1, I survey and review a representative yet robust sampling of scholarly discussion on the criteria in the last six decades of historical Jesus scholarship. From this examination three distinct responses to the criteria emerge: 1) those who generally accept the standard criteria; 2) those who offer new criteria; and 3) those who reject the criteria. Through this review the paucity of NT

(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 61–92. See also the several chapters in Anthony Le Donne and Chris Keith, eds., *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), abbreviated as *JCDA*. Certain other valuable studies from earlier decades will be discussed below.

7 E.g., Chris Keith, “Memory and Authenticity: Jesus Tradition and What Really Happened,” *ZNW* 102.2 (2011): 155–77, especially 165–76. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne (followed by others) wish to marginalize or reject the criteria approach; some favor a social memory approach. See also Chris Keith, “The Fall of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus: Concluding Remarks,” in *JCDA*, 200–205, particularly 203–04.

8 Scot McKnight quips, “Most [Jesus historians] were not trained in history but in Bible, exegesis, and plenty of theology. We came into historical Jesus debates with plenty of passion and gobs of hope and, because such folks have doctorates and are intelligent, we are historians because we think we are” (“Why the Authentic Jesus Is of No Use for the Church,” in *JCDA*, 173–85, at 177).

scholars' interaction with general historiographic methodology will become evident, a point which will be relevant for the following chapters. In Chapter 2, I briefly survey discussions of the philosophy of history and historiography to provide context for the ensuing examination of the main historiographic tools of general historians.⁹ This examination of these historians' methods demonstrates the existence of certain tools modern, general historians employ for evaluating claims in historical documents. For Chapters 3 and 4, I examine the works of certain NT scholars and modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity, respectively, to observe how the criteria as tools of historiography are (or are not) used among historians who represent a diversity of interests and expertise. In the first half of the fifth and final chapter I critically compare and analyze the application of criteria-tools among Jesus researchers and modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity in order to comment on the use of substantially comparable authenticating criteria among both groups. In the second half of the final chapter I explore some important implications of these findings and raise a few suggestions for further research. Setting one historiographic method in relief with the other reveals this surprising fact: the basic tools of general historiographic method are essentially similar to the standard authenticity criteria of Jesus research. Those who argue the criteria are invalid may thus find themselves attempting to undermine not only a method of Jesus research in particular but also a primary method of historical research of any kind.

1 The Criteria's Development within Form Criticism

For the latter half of the twentieth century the predominating method of NT scholars for writing histories of Jesus's life and ministry was the criteria-based approach, but discussion and use of various criteria to evaluate the accuracy of material attributed to Jesus are by no means exclusively modern. After the composition of gospel accounts canonical and beyond, those who have looked to these writings to learn about Jesus have employed diverse criteria to evaluate the authenticity of the deeds and sayings attributed to him. Comments from early Christians evince the use of certain criteria to distinguish authentic

9 In the context of this study, I use the term "general historians" to refer to historians whose areas of expertise lie outside biblical studies. Although the critical study of history is every bit as specialized as NT studies, I will occasionally speak of "general historians" when specificity is unnecessary. When precision is appropriate I will refer to the specific subdiscipline in question, e.g., modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity, etc.

and inauthentic traditions, such as apostolic witness or connection and a type of coherence criterion.¹⁰ Over a millennium later, Martin Luther contemplated Jesus's distinction from Judaism on the one hand and Church tradition on the other, thus utilizing a primitive form of the criterion of dissimilarity.¹¹

Despite a long history of utilizing certain tools for authenticating a given tradition, today the criteria of authenticity are frequently faulted for failing to live up to expectations.¹² In light of the growing academic study of German folk tales from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,¹³ life of Jesus researchers adapted and developed certain methods (criteria) for evaluating authentic material, leading to the further evolution of certain criteria within

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- 10 Porter discusses the use of criteria going back to the second and third centuries CE. Tertullian distinguishes between gospels written by apostles or those with close apostolic connections and those accounts not written by an apostle or one with such a connection (Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.2, 5) (in "Criteria of Authenticity," *DJG*², 153). Porter describes this implicit criterion as "proximate authorship," i.e. more weight was given to those whose personal connections either went back to Jesus himself or to an apostle. Papias indicates that Matthew wrote the *λογία* of Jesus in τῷ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39). How to interpret this phrase precisely is debated, for Papias could mean a) Matthew wrote in Aramaic or b) in a style characteristic of rabbis. For the former see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), xlv–xlv; for the latter see Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 116, who follows Josef Kürzinger, "Irenäus und sein Zeugnis zur Sprache des Matthäusevangeliums," *NTS* 10.1 (1963): 108–15 (cited in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 39n.115). See also the chapter on Semitic language and influence in Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1968), 270–93. To attempt an answer to this thorny question lies beyond the purposes of this study; instead, the present concern is that Papias recalls either the presence or influence of Semitic language on Jesus's sayings. This is an early, albeit unsophisticated form of the Semitic language criterion. Another criterion of sorts can be found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, who remarks on the collective coherence between the four Gospels despite their obvious moments of internal disagreement (*Hypotyposeis*, quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14).
- 11 Theissen and Winter, 261. Also cited by Porter, "Criteria of Authenticity," *DJG*², 153. The appendix in Theissen and Winter (pp. 261–316) contains a valuable list of dissimilarity's application ranging from Luther to the late twentieth century. Regarding the use of Aramaic and Semitic language criteria, Porter notes the discussion of Theodore Beza in Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 3.
- 12 See the introductory essay by Le Donne, "The Rise of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus," in *JCDA*, and Rodríguez, "Authenticating Criteria."
- 13 Based in large part on the work of Axel Olrik, "Eposche Gesetze der Volksdichtung," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 51 (1909): 1–12; ET, "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative," *The Study of Folklore* (1965): 129–41. Olrik believed folklore developed according to certain laws and that by understanding these laws one could more keenly understand the development of folktales. It is not difficult to see the influence of these studies on German NT form critics.

form criticism.¹⁴ Broadly speaking, form critics examined the connection of a textual form with its *Sitz im Leben*, the social context within the community from which the form arose.¹⁵ Early form critics had a common goal of peer-ing through the canonical texts to uncover the earliest possible stages of tradition transmission. Pioneers such as Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth built on Hermann Gunkel's work with Pentateuchal traditions, thereby strengthening the notion that the preliterate stages of Israelite tradition could at least be partially reconstructed.¹⁶ What they sought was an essentially reliable window into the history of ancient Israel's life and religion. Form criticism of

14 See Keith, "Memory and Authenticity," who argues this point and the implications for historical-Jesus study most fervently on 156–65. Porter's position is more nuanced in his "How Do We Know What We Think We Know? Methodological Reflections on Jesus Research," in *Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions. The Second Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Princeton-Prague Symposia Series on the Historical Jesus 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 82–99. He recognizes the criteria originated before the advent of German form criticism but argues that they fully developed within form criticism: "The criteria for authenticity in historical Jesus research began to emerge out of nineteenth-century developments in historical-critical analysis. As a result, there is no single place where one can turn to find these criteria articulated and defined in nineteenth-century historiographical thinking, but they seemed to develop as occasion warranted in terms of various issues of historical interest, including but not exclusive to the study of the Gospels" (83). He continues, "The full emergence of the criteria of authenticity seems to have coincided, however, with the rise and development of form criticism in the early to mid-twentieth-century. It is here that the criteria seem to have taken their own particular turn, and developed within biblical studies, rather than within the larger field of historiography" (84). *Pace* Porter, the review of general historiographic method in chapter 2 (below) will demonstrate that criteria such as multiple attestation, coherence, dissimilarity, and embarrassment were, in fact, defined in (late) nineteenth-century historiography.

15 For a brief introduction to NT form criticism, see Vernon K. Robbins, "Form Criticism (NT)," *ABD*, 2.841–44. The originator of biblical form criticism is normally considered to be Hermann Gunkel, who sought to discover the particular social and historical situations, in his words the *Sitz im Volksleben*, for various forms in Genesis and certain psalms. Gunkel believed he could uncover the preliterate, oral stage for many of these traditions which, he argued, were etiologically in nature. These studies coincided with his work on *Gattungsgeschichte*, the understanding of how traditions came to be linked. See Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967); idem, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1997). The introduction to Gunkel's larger Genesis commentary was published in English as *The Legends of Genesis*, trans. W. H. Carruth (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1901). For a brief introduction to OT form criticism with an orientation toward how *Gattungen* were analyzed, see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 30–44.

16 See Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966),

the NT likewise emerged at this time when a predominating concern in biblical studies was to disentangle oral traditions from their literary framework, an approach yielding substantial discussion regarding the history of different forms in the Gospels. *Mutatis mutandis*, NT form critics had largely the same aim of peering through the Gospels in order to uncover the earliest possible stages of tradition transmission. David Aune succinctly describes how form criticism thus rose to prominence in NT studies:

In the liberal quest for the most reliable documentary foundation for a life of Jesus, it was assumed that the earliest gospel, then recognized as Mark, preserved the most reliable portrait of the life and ministry of Jesus. However, William Wrede's monograph on the messianic secret of Mark, published in 1901, convinced the critical community in Germany that though Mark may have had reliable historical material available to him, he had overlaid this material with his own theological understanding of Jesus. Since source criticism was unable to identify any earlier written sources in Mark and Q, form criticism provided a new and exciting critical tool for identifying even earlier oral traditions that had been incorporated into Mark and Q.¹⁷

As Paul Anderson argues, Continental scholarship had largely abandoned work on the historical Jesus himself, and therefore later form critics furthered Gunkel's and Wrede's work by turning to the Gospels to discern oral stages of early Christian tradition.¹⁸ Julius Wellhausen published a series of monographs on the synoptics by employing "Gunkel's insight to break with the traditional explanation of the Gospels as products of written sources and to discuss the Synoptic Gospels as literature written by authors who used oral traditions."¹⁹ Along these lines, almost a decade and a half later Karl Ludwig Schmidt

1–78; Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972).

17 David E. Aune, "Form Criticism," in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune, The Blackwell Companions to Religion (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 140–55, at 141.

18 Paul N. Anderson, "Jesus in Johannine Perspective: Inviting A Fourth Quest for Jesus," *Conspectus* 32 (2021): 7–41. Anderson remarks on the "Continental Abandonment of Historical Aspirations," noting how "scholars moved from the history of Jesus to investigating the history of gospel traditions" (10).

19 Robbins, "Form Criticism (NT)," *ABD* 2:841. In a three-year span Wellhausen published the following: *Das Evangelium Marci*; *Das Evangelium Matthei*; *Das Evangelium Lucae*; and *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*.

differentiated the forms in the Gospels from their geographical and chronological frameworks, believing the latter to be contrived by the evangelists.²⁰

Although form criticism was originally devised as a *literary* tool for NT studies, it eventually developed into “a systematic, scientific, historical, and theological methodology for analyzing the forms, and to some extent the content, of the primitive Christian literature, with special reference to the history of the early Christian movement in its reflective and creative theological activities.”²¹ This largely summarizes the goals of Martin Dibelius’s 1919 monograph *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*.²² Dibelius wanted to peer behind the text to determine what settings and social events generated the Gospels. According to Dibelius, form critics viewed the evangelists not as proper authors but compilers of existing traditions. Dibelius was especially interested in how individual units of transmission were employed to meet the needs of the early church. To this end he delineated these traditions into six categories: sermons, paradigms, tales, legends, passion story, and myth. Nicholas Perrin helpfully summarizes the connection between Gunkel and Dibelius: “Synthesizing Gunkel’s interest in forms with historicism’s insistence on the staying power of oral communal traditions, Dibelius set out to reconstruct a history of forms as applied to the Gospels.”²³ Independently, Rudolf Bultmann continued along similar lines by specifically targeting both the outer crust and the inner kernel of gospel traditions.²⁴ It was Bultmann’s students, however, who brought form critical tools most fully into life of Jesus research as an all-encompassing historical methodology. The so-called “New Quest” kicked off after Ernst Käsemann’s influential 1953 lecture “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,”²⁵ and three years

20 Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu: literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), first published in 1919.

21 William G. Doty, *Contemporary New Testament Interpretation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), 62.

22 Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Scribner, 1935).

23 Nicholas Perrin, “Form Criticism,” *DJG* 2, 288–94, at 289. Dibelius’s work demonstrates the move from a history of Jesus to the history of the Gospels noted by Anderson above, “Jesus in Johannine Perspective: Inviting A Fourth Quest for Jesus.”

24 Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

25 Ernst Käsemann, “The Problem of the Historical Jesus,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), 15–47. Käsemann’s lecture was first given at a reunion of Marburg alumni on October 20, 1953, and was first published in *ZTK* 51, 1954, pp. 125–53.

later Gunther Bornkamm published his *Jesus of Nazareth*, the first major “New Quest” publication on the historical Jesus.

In its heyday form criticism of the Gospels came to rest on five assumptions about the transmission of forms:

1. Gospel traditions originated in small, isolated units and were transmitted in much the same way as folk traditions.
2. The pure form of traditions tended to become increasingly complex through acquiring layers of accretion.
3. Reconstructions of the pure form provide a window into the community’s *Sitz im Leben*.
4. Oral traditions were both generated and freely modified on the basis of the community’s needs.
5. Material authentic to Jesus can be identified by the application of the criterion of dissimilarity.²⁶

According to Norman Perrin, dissimilarity served as the surest means of ascertaining authentic Jesus tradition,²⁷ but form critics also employed least distinctiveness and coherence/consistency. Additional criteria including embarrassment, multiple attestation, and others developed as Jesus research moved through the “New Quest” into the “Third Quest” eras.²⁸ The criteria which developed within form and redaction criticism were quite naturally adapted for assessing the authenticity of traditions about Jesus’s life and teaching. However, the primary result of the criteria’s use during the New Quest, if not also the primary intention behind their use, was the *rejection* of materials, i.e. for ascertaining *inauthenticity* rather than authenticity.

For decades this mixture of form critical assumptions and in-authenticating tools (as they were used) reigned as the prevailing method for writing histories of Jesus. But as Charlesworth noted above, the once universally-employed criteria produced fundamentally incompatible results; this is regrettable but entirely understandable, for as less and less (presumably) authentic material is available the remaining material becomes increasingly open for reinterpretation and reimagining. John Dominic Crossan’s oft quoted line is apt: “Historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke,” and, “it seems we can have as many pictures [of the historical Jesus] as there are exegetes. ...

26 So Nicholas Perrin, “Form Criticism,” *DJG* 2, 290.

27 Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 71; idem, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 39.

28 The traditional schema “Old Quest, No Quest, New Quest, Third Quest” has been forcefully challenged by Porter, *Criteria of Authenticity*, 28–62. I readily acknowledge the merits of Porter’s argument, but for the purposes of this study it is unnecessary to be dogmatic either way. “Old Quest, New Quest” terminology is used here merely as convention.

But that stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment.”²⁹ Many scholars share Crossan’s sentiments. From the first noteworthy rumblings of dissatisfaction with the criteria of authenticity in the 1970s to the present, the results of criteria-based historiography have led to serious methodological soul-searching.³⁰ It is to these discussions of the criteria we now turn.

2 Decades of Discussion on the Criteria of Authenticity

The following review is necessarily representative rather than exhaustive due to the sheer number of studies devoted to discussing the criteria in particular if not NT historiographic method in general. In the course of critical reflection on the criteria from the 1960s to the present, three broad yet distinct responses to the criteria of authenticity have emerged: those who 1) are critical but accepting of the criteria; 2) offer new and/or revised criteria; or 3) reject the criteria. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century scholars largely trusted the criteria and accepted them (e.g., McArthur and Walker below), even if sometimes critically and, perhaps, begrudgingly (so Hooker). These scholars were not afraid to critique the criteria (noting especially Hooker’s work, but also Meier’s as well), but by and large they viewed the criteria as a viable method for carrying on life of Jesus research. Emerging in the latter part of the twentieth century, scholars generally remained cautiously committed to a criteria-based approach and at the same time began to offer new and/or revised criteria. These scholars believed their updated criteria could sufficiently complement the standard criteria or even revitalize the criteria approach. Despite these creative and innovative attempts, the ensuing, widely divergent conclusions of Jesus research generated new and occasionally harsh criticisms of the criteria in the early twenty-first century, resulting in the third stream of responses. Representatives of this final group have called for the marginalization or outright rejection of the criteria. Throughout the course of the review below, two noteworthy points will become evident: first, critiques of and dissatisfaction with the criteria have steadily mounted since the 1970s (when the first real challenge to the criteria was issued); second, despite NT scholars’ assurances and confidence their criteria are the tools of general historiography, these affirmations are mere lip-service, for the engagement with general historians and/or general historiographic method as a means of critically reflecting on their own methods ranges from weak to non-existent.

²⁹ Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, xxvii and xxviii, respectively.

³⁰ Allison, “It Don’t Come Easy.”

2.1 *Critically Accepts the Criteria*

Harvey K. McArthur is one of the earliest to critically review what had become the standard criteria of authenticity. He opens with the question “What may be said with confidence about the historical Jesus?”³¹ Focusing on four criteria,³² McArthur baldly warns “Since historical research is an art and not a mathematical science, the criteria suggested here cannot be applied in mechanical fashion.”³³ He offers no substantive critique of multiple attestation, remarking that it is the single most objective criterion of the four. Regarding developing tendencies, McArthur stresses the general nature of this criterion—and, consequently, its inability to assess particular sayings with precision—and its development for written texts, not oral transmission. McArthur believes multiple form attestation has some value but not as much as multiple source attestation.³⁴ Although dissimilarity is a difficult and sometimes radical criterion in light of its propensity to eliminate all but a fraction of Jesus’s teaching he nevertheless defends dissimilarity’s usefulness, arguing for the validity of excising traditions by means of dissimilarity only to readmit them by means of other criteria. He notes many scholars

accept this limitation for methodological reasons; that is, they are anxious to establish as firm a base as possible, even if only for a small amount of material. Some believe that once this minimum has been established

31 Harvey K. McArthur, “Basic Issues: A Survey of Recent Gospel Research,” *Int* 18.1 (1964): 39–55, at 40.

32 McArthur, 47–51. His four criteria are multiple source attestation, tendencies of the developing tradition, multiple form attestation, and dissimilarity. McArthur does not use the term “dissimilarity,” but this is clearly what is meant when he says “there is the criterion which suggests *the elimination of all material which may be derived either from Judaism or from primitive Christianity*” (50, italics original).

33 McArthur, 47. Some affirm historical research is at least partly scientific (William O. Walker, Jr., “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Discussion of Methodology,” *ATHR* 51.1 [1969]: 38–56, at 53) or mostly scientific (Meier, *Marginal Jew* 1.1, 30–31; Theissen and Winter, 10, 25–26; Charlesworth, “Why Evaluate ...?” 1). Others, however, criticize the scientific allure of the criteria approach (e.g., Morna D. Hooker, “On Using the Wrong Tool,” *Theology* 75 [1972]: 570–81, at 580; cf. Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 347–48, who notes the “perfect certainty” some scholars hope the criteria will offer; and Chris Keith, “The Indebtedness of the Criteria Approach to Form Criticism and Recent Attempts to Rehabilitate the Search for an Authentic Jesus,” in *JCDA*, 25–48, who observes “the criteria reached a quasi-canonical status because of their appearance that they were objective scientific common ground between scholars of different theological persuasions,” (27–28)).

34 McArthur, 50. He ponders “would it be methodologically sound to argue that a motif is authentic if it appears in a variety of literary forms even though all appearances of this motif were confined to a single source?”

with a high degree of probability, it may be possible that materials previously rejected can be reclaimed because of their congruity with elements in the established base.³⁵

Although McArthur does not treat coherence as a distinct (i.e. a fifth) criterion, readmitting material on the basis of its congruity with established elements is basically an application of a coherence criterion. Here, it is appropriate to share McArthur's own words of caution for properly understanding the limits of and employing the criteria, for some critics of the criteria (see below) mischaracterize their application: "The novice must be warned that while it is relatively easy to draw up a list of criteria, only long practice makes possible the intelligent use of these same criteria. The cynic may suggest that in actual fact long experience merely inflates one's self-confidence without actually making the use of the tools more expert. Such cynicism is probably exaggerated."³⁶

McArthur's procedure and tone typify how likeminded scholars address the criteria. He assesses the criteria's strengths and weaknesses and expresses no reason for abandoning the criteria-based approach. In his useful survey of criteria, he declines to cross-examine the methods of NT scholars with the methods of general historians, admitting any "discussion of the 'new historiography' ... assumes that some of the emphases of Dilthey and Collingwood will be taken into consideration by any who are concerned with the 'quest of the historical Jesus.'"³⁷ Although this may be the correct assumption, McArthur could have made a stronger case in this article for (or against) certain criteria if he had shown which, if any, criteria are compatible with the "emphases of Dilthey and Collingwood."³⁸ With a few noteworthy exceptions, McArthur's pattern of listing and reviewing criteria while largely ignoring the broader context of general historiographic method is programmatic for those who follow: there are resounding claims the criteria are rooted in the methods of general historians but there follows little to no discussion to substantiate those claims.

William Walker reviews the criteria amidst the broader context of why the old quest for the historical Jesus fell by the wayside.³⁹ He focuses particularly

35 McArthur, 51. Allison sharply criticizes this see-saw effect ("Marginalize," 12–13).

36 Harvey K. McArthur, *In Search of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 13–14.

37 McArthur, "Basic Issues," 54.

38 Not until five years later does McArthur offer a very brief explanation on the emphases of Dilthey and Collingwood (*Historical Jesus*, 14–15).

39 Walker, 38–39. His four reasons are: 1) form critics argued the Gospels were not biographical but essentially kerygmatic in nature which negated attempts to use the Gospels as biographical sources; 2) the work of Wilhelm Dilthey yielded a more pessimistic view of the historians' conclusions (citing Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts*

on methodology in historical Jesus research and he defines the eight criteria most commonly used in the 1950s and 1960s,⁴⁰ evenly balancing praise and criticism for each criterion's rationale and application. Walker's critiques of dissimilarity and coherence anticipate many of the same criticisms taken up more forcefully by Hooker.⁴¹ Although he (rightly) warns that NT scholars must beware the criteria-based approach's "atomistic" or "inductive" bent toward isolating single units for authentication, he nevertheless affirms how this approach can complement a more "holistic" or "deductive" approach. The holistic approach he envisions consists of building a portrait of Jesus's life on certain bedrock facts.⁴² For any portrayal of Jesus to be of historical value it must do the following: 1) situate Jesus in first-century Palestine; 2) explain why he was executed by Roman authorities; and 3) offer some plausible explanation for the origins of Christianity. Although Walker recognizes the difficulty in these three tasks, he concludes (quite reasonably), "[a]t those points where the results of the [atomistic and holistic] approaches coincide or approximate one another, the scholar can be relatively certain that he is on solid historical ground."⁴³ In light of Walker's concern with NT historical method during the new quest with its driving focus on single episodes and individual sayings,

on History and Society, ed. and introduction by H. P. Rickman [first Harper Horchbook ed., New York: Harper, 1962]; cited in Walker, 39n.2); 3) Schweitzer and the History of Religions School were seen to have undercut attempts to make Jesus relevant to the modern world; 4) Dialectical Theologians argued that Christian faith is not in a historically reconstructed Jesus but in the kerygmatic Christ.

40 Walker, 41–50: multiple source attestation; multiple form attestation; presence of Aramaic language; Palestinian environment; tendencies of the developing tradition; dissimilarity; modification; and coherence.

41 Morna D. Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," *NTS* 17.4 (1971): 480–87; idem, "Wrong Tool." Interestingly, Hooker does not cite Walker in either of her two most influential articles on the criteria.

42 Walker, 54–56. Here Walker joins a line of scholars pre- and postdating him. See, e.g., Maurice Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), at 204–15; T. W. Manson, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus—Continued: A Commemoration Day Address Delivered at Westminster College, Cambridge, in 1949," in *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, ed. Matthew Black (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1962), 3–12, at 11; Nils Alstrup Dahl, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Kerygma and History: A Symposium on the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 138–71, at 154; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 11; and the extraordinarily comprehensive treatment in Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 56, 277–464.

43 Walker, 56.

he proposes a refocused and reinvigorated old quest.⁴⁴ He also believes many NT scholars never truly abandoned the old quest, and in reference to these scholars he states “It is highly significant, however, that they seek to recover the historical Jesus through the *general methods of secular historiography* and, at least in theory, are unwilling to allow their theological convictions to govern their historical conclusions.”⁴⁵

Next, Walker briefly explores general historiography and its relevance for and similarity with NT studies—one strength of this study and the exception (as noted above) for most treatments of the criteria of authenticity. In six theses he broadly delineates the methods and concerns of general historians. First, historians of Jesus and general historians must often use documents for purposes “quite alien to the apparent intent of their authors.”⁴⁶ Second, historians must pose and answer the question whether divine influence and intervention affects historical events. He confesses, “My own view is that the historian, as historian, can reckon with the historical phenomenon of faith in such supernatural acts, but not with the alleged supernatural acts themselves; he must look for all ‘causes’ within history itself.”⁴⁷ Third, because the historian has no unfiltered access to the past he rejects the impossible goal of a positivistic view of history. The historian’s thinking is conditioned and

the work of the historian is to posit certain hypotheses about the past, examine these hypotheses on the basis of all available evidence, and ultimately accept, reject, or modify the hypothesis in terms of their comprehensiveness, inner consistency, and cogency in light of the evidence. Historiography, in other words, is as much ‘art’ as it is a ‘science,’ and it never produces certainty.⁴⁸

Fourth, the results of such study may not be relevant or useful for the Church. Fifth, and several decades ahead of his time, Walker anticipates a more favorable view of the Gospel of John as he ponders if it might preserve “a more

44 Walker, 51, who cites W. D. Davies, “A Quest to Be Resumed in New Testament Studies,” in *New Directions in Biblical Thought*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Association Press, 1960), 35–72, at 71 to the same effect.

45 Walker, 52 (my emphasis).

46 Walker, 53.

47 Walker, 53. For two recent dissenting views, see Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 85–106; and Michael R. Licona, “Historians and Miracle Claims,” *JSHJ* 12.1/2 (2014): 106–29.

48 Walker, 53; *pace* McArthur (“Basic Issues,” 47).

primitive picture of the historical Jesus than do the Synoptics.”⁴⁹ Walker offers another word of caution in his sixth thesis: those who make demands for certainty regarding each and every pericope will be sorely disappointed, but those historians who aim for a more generally reliable portrait of Jesus and the origins of Christianity will find the results of critical investigation of the Gospels more valuable.

Although Walker acknowledges historical Jesus research lies within the broader stream of general historiography (“secular historiography” above), he does not directly engage with general historians or their methodology, speaking accurately but superficially about general historiography. An analysis of historical methods outside of NT studies would enable a critical comparison of authenticating criteria within Jesus which, in turn, could further substantiate his argument for a “return to a sobered version of the old quest.”⁵⁰ For example, demonstrating particularly how general historians use the same (or essentially similar tools) as historians of Jesus on a document foreign to its author’s original purpose would have enabled him to draw further inferences as to how this reinvigorated old quest should proceed. Instead, he leaves his audience to wonder in what ways the criteria fit into “the general methods of secular historiography.”⁵¹

In 1972 Neil McEleney reviewed ten standard criteria. Not without some criticisms, McEleney generally accepts redactional criteria, as well as multiple source attestation, Semitic language, dissimilarity (if used cautiously), and historical presumption.⁵² He is less sure of other criteria, and believes multiple form attestation more likely assesses antiquity than authenticity.⁵³ Affirming E. P. Sanders’s critiques of tendencies of the developing tradition, McEleney sees only limited value for this criterion. Similarly, coherence merely places a tradition in its background, but the question “Was it said?” still stands.⁵⁴

49 Walker, 54. See, e.g., James H. Charlesworth, “The Historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: A Paradigm Shift?,” *JSHJ* 8.1 (2010): 3–46; see also Carsten Claussen, “Turning Water to Wine: Re-Reading the Miracle at the Wedding in Cana,” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 73–97, especially 89–97; and the magisterial three volumes of *John, Jesus, and History*, eds. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher, 3 vols. (Atlanta: SBL, 2007–16). The potential for using the Gospel of John to authenticate statements of Jesus is also suggested in works as early as Neil J. McEleney, “Authenticating Criteria and Mark 7:1–23,” *CBQ* 34.4 (1972): 431–60, at 434 and 434n.11.

50 Walker, 52.

51 Walker, 52.

52 On historical presumption see McEleney, 445–48. Meier, on the other hand, sharply criticizes historical presumption (*Marginal Jew*, 1:183).

53 McEleney, 436.

54 McEleney, 443.

Lastly, he largely dismisses the criterion of Jesus's style of speech in the Gospels, because it "begs the question. For it must accept the speech attributed to him as authentic before it can analyze it to find out that it *is* authentic!"⁵⁵ Using Mark 7:1–23 as a test case, he demonstrates both the value of and difficulties with these criteria.⁵⁶

McEleney's discussion of historical presumption is relevant for our purposes here. Where there is no clear reason against authenticity he believes the burden of proof rests on those who would assume the inauthenticity of gospel traditions.⁵⁷ That is, "one accepts a statement upon the word of a reporter unless he has reason not to do so,"⁵⁸ and he cites W. D. Davies as one who unwittingly appeals to this principle.⁵⁹ McEleney should be commended for promoting a criterion like historical presumption for no other reason than historical presumption provides a more holistic counterbalance to reductionistic criteria. However, his conclusions on the burden of proof are ultimately untenable: logically, the burden of proof most naturally rests on the one making an argument.⁶⁰ McEleney also fails to indicate how historical presumption relates to the burden of proof.

55 McEleney, 445 (original emphasis).

56 McEleney, 448–60.

57 For a contrasting view, with some additional discussion of criteria, see Harvey K. McArthur, "Burden of Proof in Historical Jesus Research," *ExpTim* 82.4 (1971): 116–19, especially 119.

58 McEleney, 446.

59 W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 466; cited in McEleney, 448.

60 Historical "proof" regarding a great many Jesus traditions may be difficult to attain given the distance in time, but the proof sought after here is tantamount to plausibility; Licona's image of increasing levels of "static noise" is apt (*Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?: What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 202). That the burden of proof rests on the one making an argument, see the following: Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," 485; idem, "Wrong Tool," 580; Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham, vol. 1 of (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 1:225–53, at 225–28; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 13; Evans, "Authenticity Criteria," 25; Sanders and Davies, 304; Meier, 1:183; Holmén, "Seven Theses," 350, 372; Licona, *Resurrection*, 94–99; Le Donne, "Crumbling Foundations," 13; Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 23. Sanders's and Davies's discussion is brief but also representative: unlike a courtroom where innocence is assumed until proven otherwise and thus the burden of proof is to overturn the assumption of innocence, from the outset they posit neither the authenticity nor inauthenticity of a tradition. "Rather, we weigh and assess the evidence and assign to it various degrees of probability" (304). "Proof," therefore, is not found in absolute certainty, but when, e.g., a tradition is probably authentic beyond a reasonable doubt. Thus, the burden of proof is simply the burden to make one's case.

Thus far in our review a pattern has begun to emerge: discussions of the criteria rehearse the standard criteria, comment on their strengths and weaknesses, urge caution in their use and avoidance of over-confidence, and generally (but by no means uncritically) affirm the criteria's usefulness. Some have even assured their audiences the criteria are the stuff of general historiography, but they omit any substantive treatment of general historical method. Another consistent feature is reflected in the increasing number of criteria each successive scholar lists. By the time Robert Stein published his catalogue and assessment in 1980, the number of standard criteria had climbed to eleven. Like the three studies reviewed above, Stein also catalogues and reviews the criteria, demonstrates their value and limitations with test cases from the NT,⁶¹ and concludes that no single criterion is perfect but all can be useful within their limitations. Some (tendencies of development, modification, and contradiction of authentic sayings) must be used only with extraordinary caution while others better assess antiquity than authenticity (e.g., Aramaic language). Stein, like the others before him, is hesitant to reject completely any single criterion.

Dennis Polkow's 1987 article follows the same pattern of cataloguing, reviewing, and applying criteria to a test case, but rather than examine the criteria alone he macro-catalogues, reviews, and compiles the criteria from five different studies.⁶² Since no single combination of the criteria had won universal acceptance by the 1980s, he proposes "establishing a specific and reliable [i.e. scientific] method for determining what is historically attributable to Jesus" based on the criteria.⁶³ After assembling an impressive and comprehensive list of twenty five criteria,⁶⁴ he ultimately rejects four which he deems invalid due to faulty presuppositions,⁶⁵ and combines essentially similar

61 Stein reviews multiple source and multiple form attestation, Aramaic linguistic and Palestinian environmental phenomena, tendencies of the developing tradition, dissimilarity, modification by Jewish Christianity, divergent patterns from the redaction, environmental contradiction, contradiction of authentic sayings, and coherence (228–51).

62 Polkow, "Method and Criteria." He reviews the following articles and the compilations of criteria therein: Walker, "Discussion"; McEleney, "Authenticating"; Stein, "'Criteria' for Authenticity"; James Breech, *The Silence of Jesus: The Authentic Voice of the Historical Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), particularly pp. 9, 22–26, 66–85; and Boring, "Test Case." Cf. Ben Witherington who operates with virtually the same criteria as Polkow's (*The Christology of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 28).

63 Polkow, 336.

64 See Polkow, 338–40, for the titles and descriptions.

65 Polkow, 340–41, with titles and descriptions of these four on 339. He rejects 'Birth of Christianity,' "the identification of material that accounts for (or at least elucidates) the birth of the Christian community, and is therefore attributable to Jesus"; Vividness, "the identification of narrative material containing vivid descriptions, details, etc., indicating eyewitness authority and therefore attributable to Jesus"; Intracanonical Presumption,

criteria to form a taxonomy based on what he believes is an “intrinsic hierarchical order.” He then synthesizes essentially similar criteria, narrowing his list to eight distinct criteria arranged in three groups: preliminary (Discounting Redaction and Discounting Tradition); primary (Dissimilarity, Coherence, and Multiple Attestation); and secondary (Palestinian Context, Style, and Scholarly Consensus).⁶⁶ Using the parable of the mustard seed as his test case, Polkow aims to determine the history of the parable’s transmission and the most likely original form of the parable in order to evaluate these judgments on the basis of his criteria taxonomy.⁶⁷

Writing in the late 1980s, when the “Third Quest” was in its early years,⁶⁸ Polkow concludes by leaving the reader to ponder with him the state of historical Jesus methodology. Perhaps, he suggests, the lack of methodological introspection stems from then recent scholarship’s inability to clarify and coalesce a particular method with clearly defined criteria-tools, as he has attempted to do; indeed, according to him, this inability led to the great diversity of opinions in Jesus research of his time. Polkow is right to probe into the principles and practice of our methodology, but like others before him he seems content to look for guidance down the hall, so to speak, only to what other NT scholars are doing rather than elsewhere.

In John Meier’s voluminous series he introduces the criteria with this question: How do we decide what comes from Jesus?⁶⁹ Since the Gospels are irreversibly intertwined with the faith and convictions of the early church, Meier seeks the means for determining which material comes from the earliest stage

“the identification of material at odds with the overall theology of the source containing it, and which therefore *may* be attributable to Jesus” (original emphasis); Environmental Contradiction, “identification of material that presupposes an impossible situation in the life of Jesus, and is therefore *not* attributable to Jesus” (original emphasis).

66 Polkow, 341, argues Multiple Source Attestation and Multiple Form Attestation are based on the same principle; he therefore combines them into one criterion of Multiple Attestation. Allison, on the other hand, will split this criterion into two (cf. “Marginalize,” 21).

67 Compare Polkow’s method of reviewing and evaluating criteria and applying them to a test case with McEleney’s work above. This process becomes commonplace as discussion on the criteria continues.

68 For early discussions of the then burgeoning phase in life-of-Jesus study, see James H. Charlesworth, “From Barren Mazes to Gentle Rappings: The Emergence of Jesus Research,” *PSB* 7.3 (1986): 221–30, for “Jesus Research.” The “Third Quest” moniker is Wright’s terminology in Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 379–403.

69 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1:167. This also serves as the chapter title. Compare this opening question with McArthur, “Basic Issues,” 40.

of tradition transmission.⁷⁰ Meier, like others before and after him, cautions his readers that the “rules of judgment (i.e., ‘criteria’)”⁷¹ offer only degrees of probability in which certainty is rare; a proper implementation of the criteria does not guarantee certitude, it can only recommend a tradition as being more or less probable.⁷²

Meier limits his examination to ten criteria which he divides into two categories, primary and secondary/dubious. To avoid repetition with the studies summarized above (with largely overlapping criteria) only Meier’s most salient points will be reviewed here. His first four primary criteria are embarrassment, discontinuity, multiple source and form attestation, and coherence.⁷³

Meier’s fifth criterion, rejection and execution, is essentially a particularized version of coherence but merits special consideration for its holistic approach. On coherence, Meier states “other sayings and deeds of Jesus that fit in well with the preliminary ‘data base’ established by using our first three criteria have a good chance of being historical.”⁷⁴ According to Meier, his first three criteria indicate what is most likely authentic and, on this basis, one can then include what coheres with these. The notion of coherence is the quintessence of the criterion of rejection and execution, for Meier believes this criterion “directs our attention to the historical fact that Jesus met a violent end at the hands of Jewish and Roman officials and then asks us what historical words and deeds of Jesus can explain his trial and crucifixion as ‘King of the Jews.’”⁷⁵ The question “What historical words and deeds of Jesus can explain his trial and crucifixion as ‘King of the Jews?’” ultimately seeks corroborative material which logically coheres with the bedrock facts of Jesus’s crucifixion; hence, in my estimation, rejection and execution is essentially a particularized application of coherence. Seeking corroborative material, moreover, differs essentially from the atomistic approach of certain criteria like dissimilarity and embarrassment. McEleney claimed to provide a holistic approach with his historical presumption criterion, but Meier rightly highlights McEleney’s error in wrongly shifting the burden of proof.⁷⁶ Also, while Meier disagrees

70 For reasons which Meier explains earlier, he believes historical Jesus scholars are “dependent, for the most part, on the four canonical gospels” (167).

71 Meier, 1:167.

72 Meier, 1:185n.4, citing René Latourelle, “Critères D’authenticité Historique Des Évangiles,” *Greg* 55.4 (1974): 609–38, at 618.

73 See the discussion in Meier, 1:168–75.

74 Meier, 1:176.

75 Meier, 1:177.

76 Meier agrees with Willi Marxsen (*The Beginnings of Christology: A Study of Its Problems* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969], 8) and Ben Meyer (*The Aims of Jesus* [London: SCM Press,

with those who portray Jesus as a violent revolutionary, it cannot be denied Jesus was believed to be revolutionary by at least some of his contemporaries, and that Josephus, Tacitus, and Lucian of Samosata considered his death at the hand of a Roman official worth mentioning.⁷⁷

According to Meier the remaining five criteria are questionable at best and useless at worst. Criteria six through eight (traces of Aramaic, Palestinian environment, and vividness of narration, respectively) serve complementary or supporting roles; alone these cannot establish the probability of authentic—historical—material. He believes the last two criteria, tendencies of the developing synoptic tradition, and historical presumption, are basically useless.⁷⁸

In much the same fashion as his predecessors, Meier concludes by urging caution with the criteria. These tools cannot be mindlessly applied to gospel traditions as if they automatically sift through the stages of transmission, nor should any single criterion dominate the others. Rather, “only a careful use of a number of criteria in tandem, with allowances for mutual correction, can produce convincing results.”⁷⁹ Lastly, he reiterates the goal of this work is never absolute certainty; the historian uses these criteria only for determining degrees of probability.

Meier’s treatment of the criteria is extraordinarily detailed and he is refreshingly transparent about his method: he aims to use the criteria to uncover as best as possible the Jesus of history. By “Jesus of history,” Meier clarifies, “I mean the Jesus whom we can ‘recover’ and examine by using the scientific tools of modern historical research.”⁸⁰ For Meier, these “scientific tools of modern historical research” equate the criteria,⁸¹ and although he may be correct he does not demonstrated this connection to any degree.⁸²

1979], 83 and 277n8) that the burden of proof rests squarely on the one who wishes to prove or disprove anything.

77 Meier does not mention here the criterion of “views common to friend and foe alike” (cf. Sanders and Davies, and Goodacre below) but in citing these three ancient authors he may imply the validity of this criterion.

78 Meier, 1:184.

79 Meier, 1:184.

80 Meier, 1:25.

81 E.g., he refers or alludes to scientific historical method on the following pages: 1:1, 10–11, 26–21, 197, and 278 (making special reference to inference as a methodological practice).

82 One minor exception is a brief comparison (two paragraphs) of the paucity of materials on Jesus with the comparable paucity of materials on Julius Caesar or Nero (Meier, 1:23), but here he offers no comparison of his method with that of modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity.

By the 1990s proponents of the criteria were increasingly willing to reject certain criteria while they ardently defended others. McEleney rejected at least one criterion, Polkow dismissed four other, and Meier eliminated two criteria and distrusted three others. At the turn of the millennium most Jesus researchers continued to accept what some have called “primary” criteria (so Meier), and others began to refine these primary or standard criteria.

Not long after Meier’s initial volume was published, Tom Holmén penned an essay totally and forcefully rejecting the “double” in double dissimilarity (DD). In his robust treatment of the theoretical foundations and practical applications of DD, he affirms with many others that DD “cumulatively results in a biased picture of Jesus ... biased towards detaching Jesus from his surroundings.”⁸³ Multiple attestation and coherence are therefore necessary to correct the overuse of dissimilarity.⁸⁴ Here Holmén furthers an argument by Ben Meyer who believed dissimilarity to Christianity alone was sufficient to establish authenticity.⁸⁵ Curiously, according to Holmén, Meyer’s insightful argument has largely been ignored. Holmén also accepts Hooker’s criticism of double dissimilarity (see below), i.e. that authentic Jesus traditions were expected to be both dissimilar to Judaism but also fit within Jesus’s Palestinian-Jewish milieu,⁸⁶ resulting in a “logical dead-end.”⁸⁷

Holmén argues the criteria should function as minimum requirements.⁸⁸ Underlying each criterion is a rationale which legitimates authenticity claims. For example, one such rationale is that multiple and independently generated attestation legitimates a claim to authenticity, and from this principle we derive the criterion of multiple attestation. The minimum requirement is that two independent sources corroborate a given saying, deed, or motif; three instances of corroboration is undoubtedly better but not inherently necessary to legitimate a claim to authenticity. The thrust of a *minimum* requirement is

83 Holmén, “Doubts,” 50.

84 See Holmén, “Doubts,” 50n.13 where he cites Meier, 1:173, who points to the ability of these two criteria to balance DD. Holmén also remarks there is no converse “criterion of similarity” (Holmén, “Doubts,” 49) although this is technically inaccurate, for just three years prior N. T. Wright proposed a “criterion of double similarity” (Wright, *Victory*, 132). Such a misstep by Holmén is relatively minor and does not affect the overall weight of his argument.

85 Holmén, “Doubts,” 51n.16, citing Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 86; and idem, “Objectivity and Subjectivity in Historical Criticism of the Gospels,” in *The Interrelations of the Gospels: A Symposium Led by M. É. Boismard, W. R. Farmer, F. Neirynck, Jerusalem 1984*, 1990, 546–60, at 547–48.

86 See Hooker, “Christology and Methodology,” 482.

87 Holmén, “Doubts,” 53.

88 The following discussion summarized Holmén, “Doubts,” 54–56.

this: if a criterion demands too little then the claim of authenticity may not be justified, but if it demands too much then authentic material will likely go undetected. Accordingly, demanding dissimilarity to both Christianity and Judaism requires too much. A criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity (CDC), Holmén contends, should therefore be the minimum requirement for dissimilarity.⁸⁹ Following Meyer's argument, Holmén summarizes: "Thus, double dissimilarity causes trouble when *demanded*. But to urge something as a criterion precisely means that a demand is made. Therefore the criterion of double dissimilarity is an indisputably erroneous conception."⁹⁰ Holmén thus calls for a complete and total rejection of dissimilarity to Judaism, and in its place he offers a "restructured" criterion of dissimilarity which focuses on the discontinuity between Jesus traditions and subsequent church tradition.⁹¹

Holmén's final argument is especially relevant for our purposes: "If the adjustments indicated in the present article are made, the Jesus research of biblical exegesis is, as regards to its basic methodology, again somewhat closer to commensurability with the general historiography."⁹² In a footnote Holmén further explains he does not expect general historians and NT scholars to use precisely the same methods, but awareness of general historical method will help NT scholars avoid "altogether awkward and idiosyncratic conceptions [of historiographic method]."⁹³ Based on Holmén's arguments above, we can reasonably infer Holmén would categorize DD as an "altogether awkward and idiosyncratic conception" of historical method; seeking greater alignment of historical methods among Jesus research and the methods of general historiography could, quite reasonably, enable Jesus researchers to avoid such idiosyncrasies. This is the ideal place in the article for Holmén to engage with the methods of general historians, yet he remains silent except to say the particular

89 Compare the discussion in Theissen and Winter, 19, who split DD into its constituent parts: the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity (CDC); and the criterion of dissimilarity to Judaism (CDJ). Holmén does not use their abbreviations, but CDC is essentially the same principle as Holmén discusses.

90 Holmén, "Doubts," 56.

91 Holmén acknowledges that the principle of embarrassment is essentially a more radical expression of dissimilarity: "The criterion of embarrassment exhibits but a special case of this dissimilarity test, namely when a tradition's dissimilarity to Christianity is radical enough to have supposedly caused 'embarrassment'" ("Doubts," 75). He furthermore believes scholars such as Meier and Craig Evans overstate their case when they view dissimilarity and embarrassment as two separate criteria. For Holmén, dissimilarity and embarrassment are really a difference of degree relative to what early Christians may have found challenging in Jesus traditions.

92 Holmén, "Doubts" 79. See also 79n.122.

93 Holmén, "Doubts," 79n.122.

object of study (Jesus and the Gospels) and the “scholarly tradition” keep the two groups from using the same methods. From Holmén’s discussion it is unclear why the scholarly tradition necessitates a different methodology—the differences are not insurmountable, for it seems Holmén does expect historical Jesus scholars and general historians to use *essentially* similar methods. Regarding dissimilarity in particular, it appears Holmén assumes some form of dissimilarity should serve as a methodological tool in general historiography but he offers no engagement with general historiography to demonstrate how or if general historians employ a tool like (single) dissimilarity. On these matters, Holmén leaves his readers in the dark.

2.2 *Critical but Accepting, Offers New or Revised Criteria*

Holmén’s rejection of DD provides a convenient segue to the second stream of scholars who, like those above, are occasionally critical of the criteria but who also wish to propose new or revised criteria. Scholars of the twenty-first century cite Morna Hooker as the first to express grave doubts on the usefulness of the criteria,⁹⁴ and for this reason, we begin this second phase with her. In “Christology and Methodology”⁹⁵ she rails against the criteria of dissimilarity and coherence. Following this, she offers seven critiques against the tradition-historical (i.e. form critical) enterprise of her day and the inherent logical problems with (double) dissimilarity.

First, dissimilarity as a criterion purportedly “gives us what is distinctive in the teaching of Jesus.”⁹⁶ Observing that the word “distinctive” has two English meanings, Hooker rightly states these meanings are not necessarily compatible. “Distinct” can indicate what is “unique” but also what is “characteristic.” The criteria in question were designed with the former in mind, but Hooker argues NT scholars truly desire the latter. In seeking what is unique, however, traditions overlapping Judaism and Christianity may be eliminated, and what remains of Jesus’s teachings will inevitably lead the historian to a distorted view. Dissimilarity, then, *may* provide a basis of sayings, the authenticity of

94 The final paragraph of Keith’s “Fall” in *JCDA* has the heading “The Contribution of Morna D. Hooker.” Keith says warmly of Hooker’s legacy, “A final comment on the author of the Foreword is necessary. Despite asking her to write a Foreword early on, we never intended this book to be a tribute to Morna Hooker. In putting the manuscript together, however, it became clear that the project had moved in that direction. Almost every essay in this volume cites her work as influential. One further contribution of this study, then, is to underscore the prior contribution of Morna Hooker in her criticisms of the criteria approach in the early 1970s. It has taken the rest of us forty years to catch up to her,” (205).

95 Cf. Hooker, “Christology and Methodology,” *passim*.

96 Hooker, “Christology and Methodology,” 481.

which scholars *may* have some reasonable degree of confidence, but such a collection of sayings does not decisively represent what typified Jesus's teaching.

Second, the criteria-based method assumes confident knowledge in early Judaism and Christianity. "Any comparison between the beliefs of Judaism and the teaching of Jesus which claims to find ideas in the latter unparalleled in the former is inevitably an argument from silence, and should be treated as such."⁹⁷ Third, she targets the negative use of dissimilarity, the default position for many tradition-historical critics: beginning investigations into gospel traditions with a tool designed to excise overlapping materials begs the question. Her fourth criticism further develops the third as she pointedly probes into the nature of dissimilarity. "How do we decide what is 'dissimilar'?—especially when we are reminded, also, that an 'authentic' saying of Jesus should be 'at home' in first-century Palestine."⁹⁸ She sees no good means for abating subjectivity in the application of dissimilarity, much less regarding subjectivity in the application of coherence/consistence, her fifth criticism. The historical distance between modern researchers and first-century Jewish Palestine is extraordinary and should restrain us from confident pronouncements regarding what is "coherent." And what of authentic sayings of Jesus that are internally paradoxical? As with dissimilarity, she insists on caution in applying coherence as well.

For her sixth criticism, Hooker argues there will be disastrous consequences if the inaccuracies resulting from the misapplication of dissimilarity are compounded with coherence, a criterion as prone to subjective misuse as dissimilarity. In addition to the potential for over-confidence, subjectivity, and multiplication of errors, her seventh and final criticism is a warning against the troublingly inconsistent application of these criteria which she demonstrates by examining Jesus's use of "Abba" and "Son of Man" as a test case.⁹⁹ On this basis she concludes "the real criterion being used is a particular view of the situation," not one based in rational and principled method.¹⁰⁰

Although Hooker admits the criteria can serve their purpose,¹⁰¹ she implores scholars to be less dogmatic in their conclusions. Employing the criteria as tools to assess *degrees* of authenticity—as the scholars reviewed thus far have

97 Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," 482.

98 Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," 482.

99 See Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," 483–84, for her analysis of Jesus's use of "Abba" and "Son of Man" sayings. She cites the Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering*, 41, as a case in point.

100 Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," 484.

101 She says quite plainly "The criteria that we use [for historical Jesus research] will be various. They will include the principle of dissimilarity ... but we shall use this in a positive

plainly argued—will serve to reverse these problems. To that end Hooker proposes adjustments for the existing criteria. She urges positive uses of dissimilarity and multiple attestation, and believes the presence of Aramaic language can be helpful, but only with great caution. Finally, she considers the inclusion of a new principle, that of paradox and irony, as a kind of secondary criterion to strengthen a claim to authenticity. Hooker concludes—quite reasonably—that scholars can continue to use the criteria not as rigid rules but as principles to be applied carefully for offering plausible results.

At the close of “Christology and Methodology” Hooker addresses criticism she received from Norman Perrin, who claimed she had declared form criticism to be a failure.¹⁰² In her defense Hooker cites previous statements to the contrary in which she emphasized form criticism’s usefulness as “an invaluable tool which can tell us a great deal about the history of the gospel material.”¹⁰³ But at the beginning of her subsequent article, “On Using the Wrong Tool” (1972), she admits to having second thoughts and muses introspectively, “Was I simply paying lip-service to the phrase which is now part of the NT scholars’ creed: ‘form-criticism is a useful tool?’”¹⁰⁴

In the remainder of her “Wrong Tool” Hooker largely recapitulates her “Christology and Methodology,” offering more pointed remarks on the merits and pitfalls of form criticism. She concludes, “The trap into which the form-critic so often falls is that he equates the *Sitz im Leben* with the origin of the material; the *Sitz im Leben* is not simply the ‘setting’ of the material but ... its ‘creative milieu.’ Now this is all right so long as by ‘creative’ is meant ‘that which licked the material into its present shape.’ But at this stage the form-critic too often makes the mistake of confusing form with content.”¹⁰⁵

After reiterating her seven theses from “Christology and Methodology” she adds two more plus additional comments highlighting problems with presupposing creative activity in the early church from prophets and subjectivity specifically regarding Jesus’s eschatological consciousness.¹⁰⁶ Hooker closes with this question: If these tools so often fail NT scholars, are there no other tools

way. ... Equally, the principle of multiple attestation can be used positively, not negatively,” (“Christology and Methodology,” 486).

102 Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?*, 70.

103 Hooker, “Christology and Methodology,” 485, citing her own, *The Son of Man in Mark: A Study of the Background of Term “Son of Man” and Its Use in St. Mark’s Gospel* (London: S.P.C.K., 1967), 5.

104 Hooker, “Wrong Tool,” 571.

105 Hooker, “Wrong Tool,” 573, citing R. H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study: Some Trends in the Years 1941–1962* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 40.

106 Hooker, “Wrong Tool,” 576, sections 4 and 6, respectively.

to be found? She reviews and rejects three criteria proposed by previous scholars¹⁰⁷ and concludes "... what tools must [the NT scholar] use in his task? He must, alas, use the tools we have been discussing, for there are no others, and there are unlikely to be any better ones discovered."¹⁰⁸

Hooker's outlook is admittedly grim: not only are historical Jesus scholars using the wrong tools, they are also using the tools wrongly. She believes dissimilarity and coherence can produce useful results when used with proper caution but these criteria simply cannot deliver assured results as earlier form critics once promised. As the first to offer sustained and substantial critiques of the criteria, her work undeniably influenced later scholars (see below). Despite generally strong arguments, however, Hooker's pessimistic belief that Jesus researchers have no other tools nor will any better ones be found is shortsighted. It is also worth noting here that the overconfidence of form critics which Hooker (rightly) rejects is largely absent from the proponents of the criteria thus far reviewed. Perhaps later historians of Jesus took seriously Hooker's (and others') cautions against undue certainty in the results of the criteria. What will become increasingly clear as later Jesus researchers take up Hooker's criticisms more ardently, however, is the tendency of opponents of the criteria approach to critique a straw man, taking previous generations of form critics' certainty in the criteria as representative of proponents of the criteria from the 1980s through the present day, but this is simply not how proponents of the criteria have operated from the 1970s to today.

Also writing in 1972, D. G. A. Calvert expresses similar concerns about form criticism's role in Jesus research. After reviewing both negative and positive applications of the criteria, he recommends only the positive criteria. Following Hooker, he questions the usefulness of form criticism, for "[it] has played too exclusive a role both in determining the criteria and in their application."¹⁰⁹ Instead, he believes the best of literary, source, and redaction criticism ought to be given a more prominent place in developing criteria. These criteria are multiple form attestation, and distinctiveness (noting the limited value of dissimilarity from Judaism but higher value of dissimilarity from Christianity), and a criterion favoring material that runs against redactional tendencies.

107 Hooker, "Wrong Tool," 578–79. Here she discusses P. W. Schmiedel's "pillar sayings" of Jesus, Jeremias's appeal to Aramaic language in the Gospels, and Jeremias's treatment of "I form" statements attributed to Jesus.

108 Hooker, "Wrong Tool," 580–81.

109 D. G. A. Calvert, "Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus," *NTS* 18.2 (1972): 209–19, at 219.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, discussions of the criteria repeated the same basic warnings, strengths, and weaknesses of the criteria.¹¹⁰ The major difference between Polkow's article (1987) and Eugene Boring's the following year is that Boring is one of the first to follow Hooker to offer new criteria. Boring reviews eight of the standard criteria of authenticity, offers two new criteria, and applies these to the Beatitudes as a test case. His list closely follows Stein's: multiple source and multiple form attestation, linguistic and environmental criteria, tendencies of the developing tradition, dissimilarity, modification, and coherence. Boring combines Stein's "criterion of environmental contradiction" with his own environmental criterion, and includes Stein's "contradiction of authentic sayings" as an expression of coherence. Boring also believes dissimilarity subsumes Stein's criterion of "divergent patterns from the redaction."¹¹¹ The new criteria Boring proposes are "Plausible Traditionsgeschichte," i.e. when "the whole history of the tradition, taken as a whole, may itself also be an argument that the proposed earliest form is indeed that,"¹¹² and "Hermeneutical Potential," which argues for the primacy of the tradition form most likely to generate variations of that tradition,¹¹³ not unlike textual criticism's maxim of favoring the reading which generates other readings. Like Stein, he concludes no single criterion is perfect but they are generally useful within their limitations. Throughout Boring's analysis he does not reject any of these criteria, he simply urges caution where necessary.

Not long after Boring, Craig Evans reviewed the standard criteria, arguing previous criteria studies have been "sometimes polemical, and usually lacking sufficient specific examples,"¹¹⁴ something he aims to rectify in his examination of the following criteria: multiple source attestation, multiple forms, Semitic and Palestinian features, dissimilarity, least distinctive reading, embarrassment, contradiction, and consistency/coherence.¹¹⁵

110 Cf. Boring, 12n.8. He observes that many lists of the criteria evince no direct literary dependence yet present the criteria in virtually the same order.

111 Boring, 22n.22. Inherent in this criterion is the notion that the material in question runs counter to expectation. See chapter 2 below for how this criterion of "counter to expectation" appears in the method of general historians.

112 Boring, 23.

113 Boring, 23–24. Boring readily admits these two may be better described as two aspects of the same criterion. This second criterion bears a striking resemblance to a social memory based approach to historiography (see the discussion of Chris Keith's work in chapter 5 below).

114 Evans, "Authenticity," 8.

115 By Evans's own admission, the eighth criterion (prophetic criticism) "complements the criterion of dissimilarity in that it can distinguish Jesus' understanding of Scripture from that of his Jewish contemporaries, on the one hand, and from his Christian followers

Evans most sharply critiques “least distinctive reading.”¹¹⁶ A general rule regarding the transmission of traditions once held that the tradition grew with details over time, therefore the *least distinctive* account was the (most) authentic one. Although this principle is similar to the textual critical maxim of generally preferring the shorter reading,¹¹⁷ Evans argues there are enough exceptions that it would be difficult to cite this as a rule.

Evans believes the value of these criteria lies in their offer of objectivity—one of the very things Hooker and her later followers seriously doubt. Employment of the criteria should limit the role one’s preferences play in assessing the authenticity of a given tradition. That being said, with several examples Evans demonstrates how the criteria-based approach is nonetheless susceptible to significant criticisms. Dissimilarity as a criterion “remains problematic. It is a problem because it is considered the very best of the criteria, and sometimes is viewed as though it were the only valid criterion. However, *as this criterion is often defined and employed, it simply does not work.*”¹¹⁸ Evans’s criticism is fair: dissimilarity as a principle for determining what material can *most likely* be attributed to Jesus is a fine principle to work with provided one avoids the extremes of scholars like Norman Perrin, who argued “material may be ascribed to Jesus *only* if it can be shown to be ... dissimilar to known tendencies in Judaism.”¹¹⁹ In a clear and robust discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the ten most common criteria, Evans astutely observes:

Virtually everything that Jesus said or did would have to make sense in the context of the Palestinian Judaism of his day, or his ministry would have been freakish and unintelligible. The individual components that make up Jesus’ teaching and conduct are not within Judaism particularly

whose application of Jesus’ words may not be quite the same as originally intended, on the other,” (“Authenticity,” 20). Due to the similarity of these two criteria, the eighth will not be discussed here.

116 Like others before him. Polkow quickly dismissed several he believed were ill-founded, and Calvert rejected the negative use of certain criteria. Holmén, as well, rejected dissimilarity to Judaism.

117 See, e.g., Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 276; Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 303.

118 Evans, “Authenticity,” 24–25 (my emphasis).

119 Cited in Evans, “Authenticity,” 25.

unique in themselves, it is the combination of them in a single person that seems to be without precedent.¹²⁰

He therefore recommends applying the criteria with less focus on what is dissimilar or distinct and with greater emphasis on what can give the largest picture of what is likely authentic.

To do this, Evans submits a new, “re-fashioned dissimilarity criterion supported by several complementary criteria.”¹²¹ With care and nuance he combines certain criteria, stating that “Material that reflects the social, political, and theological context of Jesus’ time, but does not reflect the interests of the church in ways that are inconsistent with those of Jesus, has a reasonable claim to authenticity. This is especially so, if the material enjoys early and widespread attestation.”¹²² Evans believes this criterion will shift the burden of proof back to the one who wishes to declare a tradition either authentic or inauthentic. With the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of the one making a claim, then, Evans hopes scholars will proceed with the assumption that all gospel traditions could be authentic and, at the same time, have experienced some degree of alteration during their transmission.

Writing the same year as Evans, E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies conclude their joint work on the Synoptics by discussing authenticating criteria.¹²³ Despite difficulties inherent in Jesus research, they believe it is possible to attain basic knowledge about Jesus, the results of which are akin to an impressionistic painting, not perfect in detail but accurate in representation: “The result will be that some aspects of Jesus’ teaching and career are firmly established, some things attributed to him are disproved, and most of the material is placed somewhere in between.”¹²⁴ By “proved” and “disproved” they refer to degrees of probability, so that when something is “proved” they believe its origin with Jesus to be “beyond reasonable doubt,” whereas a tradition that is “disproved” is “so improbable as to be unworthy of further consideration.”¹²⁵ They stress that the ultimate goal of historical research cannot be to definitively state what did or did not happen, but to argue for degrees of probability.

120 Evans, “Authenticity,” 25.

121 Evans, “Authenticity,” 25. Cf. with Theissen and Winter, *Plausible Jesus*.

122 Evans, “Authenticity,” 26–27. He goes on to say “Obviously this proposed criterion presupposes several of the other criteria.”

123 See Sanders and Davies, 301–44.

124 Sanders and Davies, 304.

125 Sanders and Davies, 304.

Sanders and Davies describe their criteria as “tests.”¹²⁶ Their first test, then, is “strongly against the grain: too much with the grain,”¹²⁷ which is ultimately a variation of the standard dissimilarity criterion. Sanders and Davies illustrate their test with the following example: in light of Mark’s explanations of Jewish customs it is probable Mark’s audience was predominantly Gentile and therefore unfamiliar with said customs. It would have been especially easy for Mark to invent stories depicting positive exchanges between Jesus and Gentiles, but it appears he has not done so. Had Mark included numerous such interactions, Sanders and Davies would consider this to be “too much with the grain,” the very thing they accuse Luke of doing. If Matthew enhanced the story of Jesus healing the Gentile centurion’s servant, Sanders and Davies believe Luke 7:9 is “a bit too much like the centurion in Acts 10” and thus “too much with the grain.”¹²⁸

Their next criterion/test, “uniqueness,” is another application of dissimilarity. After reviewing two common critiques of dissimilarity¹²⁹ they continue to find it valuable “since it may be argued that it would be useful to find out what about Jesus was unique as far as our knowledge goes, without supposing that he was altogether unique.”¹³⁰ Their first example of the uniqueness test is Jesus’s statement to let the dead bury their own dead in Matt 8:22 (//Luke 9:60). In light of the extraordinary offense with which the command would most likely have been received, and that the early church did nothing noteworthy with this saying, Sanders and Davies conclude with a note of caution, “... it is best to accept the passage as authentic on the grounds of its uniqueness, with only the caution that we never be totally sure of the category ‘unique.’”¹³¹

After these two tests, which tend toward negative conclusions, their third criterion of multiple attestation generally yields more positive results. Their main contribution to the discussion about this criterion is a more careful nuancing of what is meant by “multiple.” The two-source hypothesis is often the starting point for multiple source attestation, and as a criterion it is only as

126 Sanders and Davies admit their tests are basically criteria, “... to get started, ‘with the grain’ and ‘against the grain’ are useful *criteria* and we begin with points which illustrate their applicability” (305, my emphasis).

127 Sanders and Davies, 304–15.

128 Sanders and Davies, 307.

129 Dissimilarity is 1) designed to root out what is unique, but what is unique is not necessarily distinctive and 2) that we simply do not know enough about first-century Judaism or early Christianity to make confident judgments on what is and is not truly unique.

130 Sanders and Davies, 316.

131 Sanders and Davies, 317.

valid as the synoptic hypothesis on which it is built.¹³² Sanders and Davies opt instead for a more robust application of this criterion: they examine the overlapping material from the Gospels and Paul's undisputed letters. Their discussion on the institution of the Lord's Supper is representative.¹³³ They conclude it is difficult to determine precisely what Jesus said at this meal, but by focusing on common elements a general impression of what was said emerges.¹³⁴

Their fourth test is "views common to friend and foe,"¹³⁵ which is a specialized application of multiple source attestation. They demonstrate this criterion with two test cases to demonstrate how it operates, first on the (historic) view that Jesus worked miracles.¹³⁶ Jesus's friends and followers obviously believed he was empowered by God to perform miracles and that his miracles distinctly indicated the arrival of God's reign (Matt 12:28//Luke 11:20). It also appears Jesus's enemies believed he was empowered to perform miraculous deeds, but that the source of his empowerment was Beelzebul (cf. Mark 3:22).¹³⁷ Jesus

132 When Sanders and Davies were writing—and even currently—the two-source hypothesis remains the consensus position. Their caution anticipates Goodacre's argument against multiple attestation in "Criticizing the Criterion of Multiple Attestation: The Historical Jesus and the Question of Sources," in *JCDA*, 152–67.

133 The three subjects they treat are Jesus' teaching on divorce, the institution of the Lord's Supper, and the parousia.

134 Common elements including statements about the bread and cup (in that order except in Luke) and a connection with the bread and Jesus' body, as well as a connection with the cup and the new covenant established by Jesus' blood. Sanders and Davies also liken the synoptic prediction about drinking "in the kingdom" with the Pauline version's proclamation of the Lord's death "until he returns."

135 Sanders and Davies, 330–33. This one enjoys some support by Mark Goodacre, "What is the criterion of 'Views Common to Friend and Foe'?", *NT Pod: A Historical Approach to the New Testament*, 19 Feb, 2014, <http://podacre.blogspot.com/2014/02/nt-pod-70-what-is-criterion-of-views.html>.

136 The second is that Jesus in some way presented himself as a king or as having a kingdom. Sanders and Davies argue Jesus's opponents saw him as falsely claiming to be a king while his followers believed Jesus presented himself as a king but one who posed no military threat to Rome (332). Sanders and Davies offer a few words of caution here. There is difficulty in determining precisely how Jesus and his followers believed the kingdom would take shape.

137 Although these four criteria are not the only criteria they discuss, Sanders and Davies only these four are useful for assessing authenticity of a given tradition. They also briefly discuss the oft-proposed criterion of Aramaic and poor Greek. After a brief synopsis of what this criterion proposes to do, they dismiss it as basically useless. Presence of Aramaic language in the Gospels need not be attributed to the Aramaic-speaking Jesus because the Aramaic-speaking church made Aramaic-speaking converts. Greek that has been supposedly influenced by Aramaic (i.e., less-polished and perhaps poorer Greek) could be influenced by the LXX or could simply be what it appears to be, low quality Greek. See Sanders and Davies, 333–34.

researchers can therefore readily affirm Jesus's contemporaries believed he performed miraculous deeds.

Within the Third Quest era, Sanders and Davies have assembled one of the strongest arguments in favor of both standard and revised criteria. Three features set apart their work from other rote (if not stale) reviews of the criteria. First, by eschewing the standard nomenclature for the criteria their terminology more clearly communicates what each criterion is designed to do; greater clarity is always beneficial. Second, more clearly defining a given criterion's purpose enables more precise application of that criterion: e.g., "views common to friend and foe" is a specific application of multiple attestation. Third and finally, Sanders and Davies more carefully describe the nature of authenticity than many of their predecessors. These strengths certainly elevate their study, but their approach—like others'—remains largely insular; historians whose expertise lies outside biblical studies have much to say on these same matters. Criteria such as "that which runs against the grain" or, in other words, material which runs counter to one's expectation, and "views common to friend and foe" *are* easily found among general historians (see chapter 2 below). From the 1960s through the 1980s, the potential for interdisciplinary dialogue on the best methods remained disappointingly untapped.

As discussions of the criteria progressed into the 1990s, Craig Evans cites Meier's influence and the value of his analysis¹³⁸ for why he revisited six particularly helpful criteria.¹³⁹ After summarizing and reviewing discussions of new criteria proposed in the two decades prior, Evans observes how discussion of the criteria during the mid 1990s has crystallized around certain criteria. Because his critiques of multiple attestation, embarrassment, dissimilarity, Semitisms and Palestinian background, and coherence largely echo what has been said above, I will review only his first criterion presently.

Not to be confused with the criterion of general coherence, Evans's *criterion of historical coherence* seeks material that coheres with the bedrock facts of Jesus's life and death. Evans believes this criterion of historical coherence is the most important criterion and cites Sanders's application as exemplary. Evans chooses to focus on events rather than sayings for "the original context of the sayings of Jesus, with rare exceptions, is lost. ... As I see it, interpretation of the sayings is more vulnerable to the whims of modern subjectivity than are the events and 'facts.'"¹⁴⁰ On this basis Evans starts with Sanders's list of

138 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:167–95.

139 Evans, "Recent Developments," pp. 1–49 in *Jesus and His Contemporaries*. Cf. the ten criteria he reviewed in "Authenticity."

140 Evans, "Recent Developments," 14.

eight facts of Jesus's life¹⁴¹ and adds four more: 1) Jesus was highly probably viewed by the public as a prophet; 2) he spoke often about the kingdom of God; 3) the temple controversy involved the ruling priests; and 4) Jesus was crucified as "king of the Jews."¹⁴² Whereas some have criticized the criteria's atomistic approach (see above), Evans's criterion of historical coherence is markedly more holistic. In chapter 2 we will see that Evans's criterion is substantially similar to general historians' robust and nuanced application of historical coherence.

In the midst of N. T. Wright's magisterial series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, Wright briefly discusses the value of balancing dissimilarity with a criterion of "double similarity."¹⁴³ He argues "Along with the much-discussed 'criterion of dissimilarity' must go a criterion of double similarity: when something can be seen to be credible ... within first-century Judaism, *and* credible as the implied starting point (though not the exact replica) of something in later Christianity, there is a strong possibility of our being in touch with genuine history of Jesus." Wright breathes new life into these discussions with his "double similarity" criterion because, unlike many negative criteria which exclude material, Wright's positive criterion may help Jesus researchers include material.

Sensing growing frustration with the criteria in the first decade of the 21st century, Holmén reentered the discussion to advance seven theses on the (then) current state of historical Jesus research.¹⁴⁴ First, "Scholarly inquiry must have guidelines to follow."¹⁴⁵ This should be obvious, but he questions why it seems many Jesus researchers want to abandon the criteria; historians of Jesus will always need methods to assess the authenticity of Jesus traditions and for this reason he believes there will always be criteria for assessing authenticity despite protests against them. An aspect of Holmén's sixth thesis is relevant here for it relates specifically to the criteria's role as guidelines. He argues that discussions of the criteria should always include specific statements regarding both their application and rationale,¹⁴⁶ and the application and rationale for

141 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 11.

142 Evans, "Recent Developments," 15.

143 Wright, *Victory*, 132 (original emphasis).

144 Holmén begins with this great one-liner, "As a Lutheran, I have always found a special appeal in nailing up theses as a means of communication," ("Seven Theses," 343). I am omitting discussion of thesis #2 (pp. 348–51) for the sake of space.

145 Holmén, "Seven Theses," 344.

146 E.g., on the application of dissimilarity Holmén says "If a piece of information can be seen to be dissimilar to early Christianity (its gain, success, interests, views, practices and/or theological tendencies, and so on), it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity" ("Seven Theses," 367). He discusses the rationale for dissimilarity: "The early Christians

each should be distinct and unique to that criterion; that is, there should not be two separate criteria for the same purpose, nor should one criterion have two or more rationales.¹⁴⁷

Third, Holmén states “The criteria of authenticity are not dependent upon the traditional tradition or form criticisms.”¹⁴⁸ Despite (some of) the criteria’s development and application within tradition and form criticism, Holmén believes the criteria do not need a form critical environment in which to operate effectively.¹⁴⁹ Variations of the criteria were developed and applied before the advent of tradition and form criticism, and Holmén suggests “by concentrating on pieces of information distinguishable on the basis of informational contents rather than traditional tradition- or form-critical arguments, and then applying the criteria of authenticity to them, the criteria can work irrespectively of the chosen overarching tradition-critical solution.”¹⁵⁰ This, Holmén believes, would allow the criteria to operate independent of any particular tradition-critical solution.

For theses four through six, Holmén tackles dissimilarity and multiple attestation. In his fourth thesis he argues “The criterion of dissimilarity is a valid tool of authenticity and has no more or greater odds against it than the other standard tools have.”¹⁵¹ Holmén affirms the maxim of Jesus research that the early church would not have created for themselves traditions about or sayings from Jesus they found difficult. As Theissen and Winter (see below) insist the criterion of dissimilarity to Christianity (CDC) must be applied “in a controlled manner,” Holmén posits two controls to demonstrate how to apply CDC in a “controlled manner.” First, it must be understood that where dissimilarity is

(i.e., the people behind the sources for Jesus) would probably not have devised notions about Jesus in which they were not interested or that they would expect to lead to trouble” (368).

147 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 368, cites Polkow, “Method and Criteria.” Polkow catalogued 25 criteria and distilled them to 8—although Holmén (368) claims Polkow derived only 6—in order to show how frequently the criteria have overlapped application or rationales in generations past. Holmén goes on to argue that one cannot bifurcate the rationale of dissimilarity into two separate rationales where one focuses on the aspect of disinterest (i.e. a criterion of dissimilarity) or the aspect of embarrassment (trouble for the early church).

148 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 351.

149 Compare, for example, with Porter (2000 and 2013) and Keith (“Memory and Authenticity”) who sharply criticize the standard criteria due to their development and employment within form criticism.

150 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 354. Keith’s main protests against the criteria’s form-critical upbringing is the model of authenticity inherent in form-criticism (see chapter 5 below).

151 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 356, Thesis #4.

lacking, the CDC does not suggest inauthenticity.¹⁵² (In fact, Holmén argues the negative use of dissimilarity should be rejected absolutely, his fifth thesis.¹⁵³) Second, CDC is a tool designed for a specific purpose and must therefore be limited to a specific kind of material.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, CDC works for cases of multiple attestation and coherence. Yet these, too, have their limitations: multiple attestation, typically defined, is based on a particular understanding of the synoptic problem which weakens its potency, and coherence serves only a secondary role. Holmén concludes “the other standard criteria [i.e. multiple attestation and coherence] do not promise anything better which would justify a claim to supplant the dissimilarity criterion.”¹⁵⁵ New criteria may provide a way forward,¹⁵⁶ but he warns against the hope of finding a flawless tool. For this reason CDC, multiple attestation, and coherence must complement one another.

Sixth, Holmén demands the criterion of multiple attestation be “delumped.”¹⁵⁷ That is, there exist two rationales often cited for multiple attestation and each should be separated and two distinct criteria formed:

152 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 359.

153 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 362. Dissimilarity can (positively) provide arguments for authenticity but it should not be used (negatively) to reject traditions. Holmén observes several scholars who reject the negative application of dissimilarity in principle but who nevertheless apply it negatively. Pointing to Sanders and Davies as representative of this vacillation, he cites them saying “[a passage] is historically unlikely if it agrees too closely with that [the early church] wished and corresponds to Christian doctrine” (Sanders and Davies, 304–05, cited in Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 363). Holmén responds, “do the writers really mean that Jesus’ followers could never quite agree with him or that even if they sometimes could agree with him fully, they would not pass on those points of clear agreement (while many points of disagreement would have been preserved)?” (Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 364). Holmén further accuses Funk of mixing implausibility with dissimilarity. Funk states “Traces of later Christian orthodoxy attributed to Jesus or his first followers are anachronistic,” (Robert Walter Funk, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998], 35). Holmén argues this is a different matter altogether. If Funk wants to point to anachronism, then the real issue is not dissimilarity but implausibility, for later elements are inherently implausible in Jesus’s earlier context (for more, see below). Holmén thus believes that what should arise in place of the negative application of dissimilarity is a criterion of implausibility so that one can “more properly speak of the implausibility of the piece of information with respect to Jesus’ context, time and place,” (“Seven Theses,” 363).

154 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 360.

155 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 361.

156 Here Holmén cites Porter, *Criteria of Authenticity*.

157 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 368.

multiple attestation and recurrent attestation.¹⁵⁸ For Holmén, *multiple* attestation applies directly to sources (plural) in which a tradition or motif is found. A theme or motif, on the other hand, recurring throughout the tradition stipulates a different criterion altogether, known as *recurrent* attestation. He explains, “Indeed, the leap from individual pieces of information attested in two or three tradition passages [i.e. multiple attestation] to general motifs appearing scattered throughout the Jesus tradition [i.e. recurrent attestation] means a difference in kind.”¹⁵⁹ Holmén closes this thesis somewhat optimistic that this careful bifurcation of multiple attestation could yield another positive criterion for Jesus research.

Lastly, for his seventh thesis Holmén expresses his desire for workable negative criteria to indicate a tradition’s inauthenticity. Most criteria function positively to establish the probability of authenticity. Although Holmén believes the burden of proof has rightly shifted and now rests on the one making any argument for or against authenticity, he wonders “If one accepts the middle position [i.e., the burden of proof rests on the one making a claim] as a valid scheme for the placement of the burden of proof, how can one think inauthenticity could be proven if there are no, or not cogent enough, criteria for the purpose?”¹⁶⁰ To this end Holmén offers two negative criteria. The first is implausibility, conceptually related to yet distinct from dissimilarity. The application and rationale for implausibility are:

Rule of application: If a tradition passage or motif involves features *integral* to it that are incapable of being plausibly situated in the Palestine of Jesus’ time, inauthenticity of the tradition or motif is suggested.

Rationale: Such features are by definition dislocations and/or anachronisms, and tradition passages or motifs that integrally depend on them can be deemed as dislocated and/or anachronistic traditions and motifs.¹⁶¹

158 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 370nn.88–89, builds on work done by Allison, but at the time Holmén published “Seven Theses” Allison’s “Marginalize” in *HSHJ* was still forthcoming. Holmén cites the following line from Allison, “It is in favor of what I am saying that scholars often conduct business as though what I am saying is true,” which was later published in Allison’s “Marginalize,” 25.

159 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 370.

160 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 373.

161 Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 373 (my emphasis). An example of arguments for and against anachronisms that are *integral* to certain traditions in the Gospels can be found with the discussion of Luke’s use of συναγωγή for a physical structure: cf. Howard Clark Kee, “The Transformation of the Synagogue after 70 C.E.: Its Import for Early Christianity,” *NTS* 36.1 (1990): 1–24, who argues Luke’s mentions of synagogues is anachronistic; and the

For Holmén, the concept of integrality is essential to this criterion and functions in one of two ways: 1) if certain features of a piece of information are integral to that tradition or motif and those integral features are found to be implausible in Jesus's context, then the entire tradition or motif is suggested to be inauthentic; 2) on the other hand, if certain features of a piece of information are not integral to that tradition or motif and those non-integral features are found to be implausible in Jesus's context, then other criteria must be employed. This new criterion is promising, but one minor drawback is that Holmén does not carefully define here how one determines whether a piece of information is integral to a tradition passage.

The second negative criterion Holmén introduces is a criterion of incoherence:

Rule of application: If a tradition passage or a motif is incoherent with what has already been deemed as authentic, inauthenticity of the tradition or motif is suggested.

Rationale: On the basis of what we already know about Jesus, this is what we would not expect him to say or do.¹⁶²

Holmén recognizes the relative weakness of this second criterion, noting how people are often inconsistent, that ancient persons think differently than moderns do (given the penchant for paradox and tension in ancient Semitic thought), and that while preaching Jesus was hardly striving for a systematic presentation of his thought. His negative criterion of implausibility is on more solid ground than the criterion of incoherence, and he is to be commended for what he believes is a small step toward creating a truly robust method for assessing both authenticity and inauthenticity.¹⁶³

The studies I have briefly reviewed above share many strengths and weaknesses. Each generally critiques the criteria fairly and provides various examples of their application. Holmén stands out not only for urging greater transparency with the traditional criteria's rationales and applications but also for offering new negative criteria. The persistent weakness, however, is that each scholar above treats only other NT scholars' methodology. It might be unfair to critique a given study for not doing what it never proposed to do, and

response by Richard E. Oster, "Supposed Anachronism in Luke—Acts' Use of ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΗ," *NTS* 39.2 (1993): 178–208.

162 Holmén, "Seven Theses," 374.

163 Holmén, "Seven Theses," warns "an *exclusive* use of tools suited to identifying authentic material can no longer count as an adequate authenticity method" (375, my emphasis).

this may even beg the question of whether Jesus researchers should concern themselves with methods outside our sub-discipline. It is, however, in favor of what I am saying that scholars have operated as if it is valid to look outside biblical studies for methodological (as well as conceptual or ideological) guidance—feminist, social scientific, or postcolonial approaches for studying of early Christianity draw from other disciplines. Furthermore, for decades Jesus researchers have described their roles as historians and have, at times, even appealed to the methods of general historiography (see above). However, when analyzing and critiquing the purported tools of general historiography, they have consistently and inexplicably ignored or omitted any significant or substantial interaction with general historians' methods.

From the late 1960s to the mid 1990s, reviews of the criteria of authenticity followed one basic trajectory:¹⁶⁴ despite some criticisms, the criteria were deemed relatively trustworthy so long as they were used with due caution and that the results of this criteria-based historiography were reported in degrees of probability rather than with absolute certainty. Thus far, Hooker has been the most critical, but even she admitted these were the tools to use. Evans and Meier, following Sanders, independently proposed new criteria which are rooted in the standard criteria—coherence, dissimilarity, and multiple attestation. Likewise, Sanders's and Davies's tests are essentially variations on the traditional criteria of dissimilarity, multiple attestation, and embarrassment. The various proposals above were intended to supplement the standard criteria or to strengthen their application. But following Gerd Theissen's 1996 article and his co-authored monograph with Dagmar Winter the next year,¹⁶⁵ the criteria came under greater attack. Although Theissen's work fits comfortably in our second category ("Critical but accepting; offers new criteria") his work clearly influenced later scholars who increasingly doubted the criteria's usefulness. Theissen's work is positioned here before the third category—and not in chronological order—to represent the transition from a "critical but accepting" position to the "marginalize/reject" position in criteria studies.

One of the real strengths of Theissen's article, and, by comparison, a weakness of other studies, is the quality of discussion regarding the philosophy of

164 During the 1980s and 1990s, the Jesus Seminar rose to some measure of fame for, among other things, their peculiar application of certain criteria (most notably dissimilarity and multiple attestation): Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993). A pointed, contemporary critique of the Jesus Seminar's approach can be found in Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 42–57, especially 46–48 on their application of criteria.

165 Theissen, "Leap"; Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*.

history and historiography as they relate to the criteria; this discussion provides the framework for his new criterion. According to Theissen, the principle of historical relativism implies the interconnectedness of all historical phenomena with the result that there is nothing truly unique in history. Historic and orthodox Christian faith, however, relies on a unique phenomenon in history, Jesus's position and role as Son of God. In order to examine Jesus's uniqueness, Theissen analyzes the application of the criterion of dissimilarity.

Dissimilarity can be impracticable and misleading: impracticable as it seeks to affirm a negative in the absolute which simply cannot be verified; misleading "as it surpasses all the features which Jesus has in common with Judaism and Early Christianity."¹⁶⁶ On this basis, Theissen concludes dissimilarity can combat the problem of historical relativism in this manner: while historical events and personages need to be interpreted in their contexts, at the same time "every historical phenomenon can be individualized due to its complexity as a synchronic structure and the singularity of each stage in a diachronic development."¹⁶⁷ As a historical reality, then, Jesus must be studied contextually within first-century Judaism and appreciated as an individual phenomenon. Theissen concludes it is therefore necessary to revise the criterion of dissimilarity.

His revision of dissimilarity leads to a new "contextual plausibility" criterion composed of two sub-criteria, "contextual correspondence" and "contextual individuality."¹⁶⁸ The former emphasizes that "all that we attribute to Jesus must be imaginable in the historical context of his life."¹⁶⁹ On the latter, Theissen states "we will always discover individual features of Jesus against the background of a given correspondence."¹⁷⁰ These individual features are tradents which are attested elsewhere, either synchronically or diachronically.

The following year Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter presented the definitive, critical history of the criterion of dissimilarity and proposed its replacement with the *criterion of historical plausibility* (CHP).¹⁷¹ It is not necessary

166 Theissen, 163. He further cites Hooker's criticisms of dissimilarity, as many have before him. But to be fair, he also states "We should do justice to those who formulated the criterion of dissimilarity. They knew it was one-sided," referring to Ernst Käsemann, observing "But the criterion [of dissimilarity] indeed functions in a biased way when he connects it with an evaluation" (163n.21).

167 Theissen, 165.

168 Theissen, 166.

169 Theissen, 166.

170 Theissen, 168.

171 Theissen and Winter, *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*. Craig Blomberg believes Wright, with his double similarity criterion, and Theissen and Winter, with their criterion of historical plausibility, have "independently formulated equivalent criteria" (*The Historical Reliability*

here to rehearse the history of dissimilarity's development¹⁷²; instead I will consider only their taxonomy of criteria in order to set their new criterion into its proper methodological context. Theissen and Winter show how the form and redaction critical goals of separating legendary material from the authentic under the guise of historical critical work were inextricably laced with theological motives,¹⁷³ especially with regard to Jesus's essence and uniqueness.¹⁷⁴ This union

posed a fundamental problem. Since the beginning of Jesus research a call has regularly been issued for a *methodology based on secular historical study or on the attempt to operate in a manner that satisfies the demands of secular historical research, and for the development of methods that are valid for all historical sources*. Nevertheless, as a rule the criteria were developed only on the basis of the New Testament text and applies only to them, in order to excavate from them the authentic Jesus material they contained. In their formulation, methodological considerations of general historical science play an amazingly small role.¹⁷⁵

According to Theissen and Winter, the criterion of dissimilarity as traditionally conceived is problematic because it is markedly unlike general historical method due to the theological interests inherent in the criterion. They also point to the "linguistic and material vagueness of the term 'dissimilar,'"¹⁷⁶

of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 64). If not equivalent, the similarities are indeed remarkable.

- 172 For their discussion, which is thorough and helpful, see Theissen and Winter, pp. 27–171.
- 173 Theissen and Winter note how typical uses of CDC and CDJ imply a particular view of Jesus already determined by a Christian understanding of him (e.g. that Jesus surpassed Judaism in some way), thus begging the question. More perniciously, theological motives colored the use of CDJ in which "theological anti-Judaism played a role" (24).
- 174 The following is a brief summary of Theissen and Winter's five points on the theological problems inherent in the quest for reliable criteria (9): 1) emphasis on the words of Jesus in Protestant theology manifested in the importance of determining the historical authenticity of certain sayings attributed to Jesus; 2) what was considered historically authentic could become a theological argument; 3) there was often no distinction between what was deemed "essential" of Jesus and what was deemed "authentic"; 4) history and theology mix in the criterion of dissimilarity, which focuses on what was unique about Jesus, unique either as God's revelation or as a unique figure in history; and 5) christological questions on the trustworthiness of scripture "emerged regarding the continuity and/or discontinuity between the historical Jesus and Jesus Christ as portrayed by canonical texts from the point of view of faith."
- 175 Theissen and Winter, 10 (my emphasis).
- 176 Theissen and Winter, 21.

highlighting not only the variety in nomenclature for this criterion (dissimilarity criterion, nonderivable criterion, criterion of discontinuity) but also what this criterion purportedly seeks (deviation, contradiction, contrast, unprecedented material). Ironically, these differences manifest extraordinary dissimilarity in the application of dissimilarity. The only positive to be found, per Theissen and Winter, is a consensus in favor of dissimilarity's positive use.¹⁷⁷

Accordingly, they argue "it is not what is dissimilar to its Jewish and early Christian environment that is to be regarded as authentic. Rather, each individual historical phenomenon is to be considered authentic that plausibly can be understood in its Jewish context and that also facilitates a plausible explanation for its later effects in Christian history."¹⁷⁸ For these reasons the CHP is composed of two sub-criteria: the criterion of contextual plausibility¹⁷⁹ and the criterion of the plausibility of effects (which is slightly different from what Theissen argued above in his 1996 article but overwhelmingly on the same trajectory). Contextual plausibility is further subdivided in two: contextual appropriateness, that Jesus must fit within first-century Galilean Judaism; and contextual distinctiveness, meaning "What Jesus intended and did must be recognizable as that of an individual figure within the framework of the Judaism of that time."¹⁸⁰ Plausibility of effects is composed of source coherence and resistance to tendencies of the tradition, i.e. the persistence of materials contradicting the interests of early Christians. According to Theissen and Winter, this criterion allows for both continuity and discontinuity and—most relevant for this study—they believe it "correspond[s] to the generally accepted methods of historical science [...] that can thus be applied not only to Jesus traditions but *mutatis mutandis* to other comparable traditions,"¹⁸¹ an assertion which, unfortunately, they do not substantiate further. Nevertheless, with

177 Theissen and Winter, "Presently the majority of scholars—to the extent that they use the criterion of dissimilarity at all—favor the positive application of the criterion" (22).

178 Theissen and Winter, xv. They continue, "We thereby come to terms methodologically with one of the most important results of more than two hundred years of Jesus research: the historical Jesus belongs to two religions, to Judaism and Christianity. Our criterion of historical plausibility transforms this discovery into a presupposition of historical-critical work with the Jesus tradition. That means that anyone who applies historical methods to the study of Jesus cannot do so without accepting in advance the guideline that Jesus belongs in the context of Judaism and also that his influence continued to affect Christianity in the form of the source that testify to him" (xv). This is substantially similar to a statement a year earlier from Wright regarding his criterion of double similarity (*Victory*, 132).

179 Cf. Theissen's criterion with the same name in "Leap."

180 Theissen and Winter, 211.

181 Theissen and Winter, 25–26.

this criterion they hope to correct the popular yet problematic criterion of dissimilarity.¹⁸²

Theissen's and Winter's discussion of dissimilarity's rationale and application is second to none. They rightly expose the theological underpinnings in its application by form critics, and they are to be further commended for their proposal of a historiographic tool which has the potential for yielding a maximum of valuable results. It would be a stretch, however, to call this a truly new criterion. By fashioning a new conceptual and practical framework for the standard criteria, they have basically restructured the application of certain criteria,¹⁸³ albeit with unmatched eloquence. This is not inherently bad, for CHP is a valuable criterion, but neither is it inherently new. Another critique related to this criterion thus arises. In multiple stages of their argument Theissen and Winter state their new criterion is comparable to the methods of general historians, but they merely assert this connection. It may very well be comparable, yet given how little NT scholars engage the methods of general historiography in the context of discussing their own methods—when it would be most contextually appropriate to lay the two methods side-by-side—it is hardly acceptable to assume NT scholars enjoy a broad familiarity with general historiographic method; the dearth of NT studies which treat the concept and application of criteria within general historiographic method is precisely the reason for this study.

The studies by Evans, Sanders and Davies, and Meier stand out for their detailed analysis and fair assessments of the rationales behind and application of the criteria. They sought in the criteria a reliable, scientific historiographic method while consistently urging caution in applying the criteria. Also helpful, though less detailed, are the articles by McArthur, Walker, and Polkow. Although these scholars voice some concerns about the criteria, they nevertheless express a predominantly positive take on the criteria. Theissen's and Winter's approach stands out for its well-reasoned complexity, but in practice they also operate with the standard criteria, albeit in their own schema. Evans, and Theissen and Winter (and Holmén in the previous section) do take Hooker's criticisms seriously by looking for truly new criteria; notably, each of these mentions the tools of general historiography as well. Soon afterwards, other scholars began proposing new criteria or totally new methods, but the most consistent feature of these latter proposals is the increasingly

182 Cf. the title of their chapter 3, "The Criterion of Historical Plausibility as a Correction of the Criterion of Dissimilarity: Methodological Aspects of the Quest for Criteria," 172.

183 Dunn believes they have not really offered a new criterion at all, but have offered "a restatement of historical method" (*Jesus Remembered*, 83).

grave outlook on the standard criteria. The following studies clearly evince the growing pessimism regarding the criteria, a pessimism which culminated in the publication of Chris Keith's and Anthony Le Donne's *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* in 2012.

2.3 *Marginalizes or Rejects the Criteria*

Stanley Porter offers one of the most extensive reviews of the criteria of the twentieth century in his 2000 monograph, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*. Most pertinent for this discussion are Porter's second and third chapters in which he examines the development of the criteria (chapter 2) and critiques two major attempts from the late twentieth-century to revitalize the criteria which, he believes, "merit special attention (chapter 3), if for no other reason than to see that not as much progress has been made in this discussion as one might have thought or hoped for."¹⁸⁴ Due to the traditional criteria's apparent failures, in Part II Porter proposes three new criteria rooted in the use of Greek in the NT: Greek language and its context; Greek textual variance; and discourse features.¹⁸⁵

In his second chapter Porter reviews DD, least distinctiveness, coherence/consistency, multiple attestation/cross-section method, and Semitic language phenomena,¹⁸⁶ and he concludes with two macro-level observations. First, the criteria which developed within form criticism are still used now in much the same way as they were in the mid-twentieth century. This troubles Porter: if form criticism has almost entirely fallen out of favor, one would expect its methods to have fallen out of favor as well, but to him there is little discernible

184 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 21. Here he refers to Meier, Evans (*Contemporaries*), and Theissen and Winter. Although Porter himself offers new criteria (which could place him in the second group), his major critique against Theissen and Winter is that their new criterion relies too heavily on the standard criteria (see below). Porter's increasing skepticism toward the standard criteria thus places him in the third group.

185 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, chapters 4–6, respectively. Porter's new criteria do not appear to have received widespread support.

186 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 70–99. See also Porter, "Luke 17.11–19," Shin, *Textual Criticism*, 186–87, and Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 45, have at least looked favorably upon the introduction of new criteria. Dunn, however, demurs that Jesus spoke Greek (*Jesus Remembered*, 83). Porter's Greek criteria has received some pushback from Bird, "Response to Stanley E. Porter." Porter responded in the same volume with "The Criterion of Greek Language and Its Context: A Further Response," *JSHJ* 4.1 (2006): 69–74. To Porter's credit, in "Criteria of Authenticity," he even-handedly reports the critiques from Dunn and Bird but simply reaffirms (*pace* Bird) his Greek criteria are not dependent on the traditional criteria (*DJG* 2, 160–61).

difference in how some NT scholars today use form-critical criteria. Second, the criteria are products of their time and, for this reason, their employment in the study of the historical Jesus should be reconsidered. These two concerns are certainly worth considering: if the presuppositions of form or redaction critics have been soundly cast off, might it be unwise to carry on with these criteria?¹⁸⁷

In chapter 3, Porter reviews discussions of the criteria from the last two decades of the twentieth century and focuses particularly on the works by John Meier and Gerd Theissen (with Anette Merz and Dagmar Winter) to examine their treatments of embarrassment, rejection, and execution. Porter seizes on Meier's warning about embarrassment, taking the opportunity to undermine not just that particular criterion but the criteria of authenticity in general, for

a similar [cautionary] statement could be made for virtually every one of the criteria for authenticity. Virtually every one of the criteria that still seems to have validity has the limitation that there is a perceivable gap between what the criterion seems to establish and what can be grounded in the life of Jesus, so that a given criterion cannot provide an absolute bedrock for grounding the traditions of the historical Jesus, but is in some way dependent upon other criteria used in conjunction.¹⁸⁸

Porter's warning about the circularity of such an approach, where individually insufficient criteria bolster one another in a methodological house of cards, is followed with increasing frequency by Allison, Keith, Le Donne, and others.

Next, Porter examines Meier's and Evans's variations of the criterion of rejection and execution. Since these criteria were detailed above,¹⁸⁹ a brief recap of each will suffice here. Meier argues this criterion does not speak *directly* to the authenticity of a particular saying or deed of Jesus, but instead highlights the fact and circumstances of Jesus's death "and then asks us what *historical words and deeds* of Jesus can explain his trial and crucifixion as 'King of the Jews.'"¹⁹⁰ Evans raises this issue: "We must ask how it was that an itinerant teacher from Galilee was put to death on a Roman cross."¹⁹¹ On the basis of certain well-founded facts of Jesus's life and execution, Evans believes these

187 Pace Holmén who argues strongly that the criteria as used today do not necessarily operate with form or redactional critical presuppositions ("Seven Theses," 351–56).

188 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 109–10.

189 See also Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:177; Evans, *Contemporaries*, 13–15.

190 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:177 (my emphasis).

191 Evans, *Contemporaries*, 14.

form the historical framework which can then be “used as a primary criterion for determining what sayings and episodes ought to be considered the stronger candidates of authentic tradition and how they should be interpreted.”¹⁹² Porter sees irreconcilable differences in these expressions of the criterion of rejection and execution:

It seems clear to me that this criterion of rejection and execution *is being used in two very different, and arguably incompatible, ways by Evans and Meier*. Evans treats it as the fundamental criterion for historical-Jesus research, and uses it in a very specific and precise way—he assumes the fact of Jesus’ execution at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities, builds this fact into a network of what he would see as coherent facts, and argues that any specific action or word of Jesus that is coherent with this historical scenario is potentially authentic. Meier treats this criterion as an unspecific stipulation, not useful for adjudicating individual actions and words but as a means of drawing attention to Jesus’ violent death, and actions compatible with this. It is not clear to me whether those on either side of this difference of definition and utilization realize the fundamental antipathy that has been created.¹⁹³

Porter’s analysis is undeniably thorough but he misses the mark. The “fundamental antipathy” he perceives quickly fades away upon a side-by-side comparison of what Meier and Evans propose. Both begin with the fact of Jesus’s crucifixion, and on that basis, both pose virtually the same question, what led to Jesus’s crucifixion? Porter claims that Meier operates with a criterion “not useful for adjudicating individual actions and words but as a means of drawing attention to Jesus’ violent death, and actions compatible with this”; on the contrary, Meier quite clearly points to the power of individual actions and words to explain why Jesus was crucified by the Romans under a political accusation.¹⁹⁴ Certainly, there may be some difference in starting point or emphasis, but

192 Evans, *Contemporaries*, 14–15.

193 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 112 (my emphasis).

194 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:177. In Meier’s own treatment (*Marginal Jew*, 1:191n.42) he cites Walker (“Discussion”) for the three “criteria” that must be satisfied to form an adequate picture of the historical Jesus. By “criteria” Walker means something more akin to a guiding principle or rule, not a criterion in the technical sense of “dissimilarity,” “multiple attestation,” etc. The second rule is “[an adequate portrait of the historical Jesus] must show why his life ended in execution at the hands of the Roman authorities ...” (55). A clear implication of this rule, of which Meier approves, is the examination of how individual actions and words of Jesus led to his crucifixion, *pace* Porter.

Porter appears to be splitting hairs; the true difference is only that Evans more quickly addresses the matter of particular sayings of Jesus, whereas for Meier this is an implication of beginning with Jesus's execution. Their ultimate aims are nonetheless harmonious.

Finally, Porter addresses the work of Theissen, Merz, and Winter and praises the trio for attempting to provide a method that seeks to create a truly "complex picture of Jesus, which cannot be rejected apart from creating a more plausible scenario."¹⁹⁵ That being said, Porter levels three criticisms against Theissen which, for him, largely negate whatever positives may be found in Theissen's new criteria. First, Theissen has succeeded in merely shifting the emphasis of the criteria rather than truly overhauling the criteria; Porter laments Theissen's reliance on the traditional criteria to construct his new criteria.¹⁹⁶ Second, Porter believes Theissen's method lacks clarity regarding when it is appropriate to invoke coherence and dissimilarity, for these are technically at odds with one another. Although Porter approves of Theissen's appeals to plausibility he believes Theissen has not adequately defined plausibility nor how it works with both coherence and dissimilarity. Third, Porter states "In Theissen's conclusion, the criterion of historical plausibility is used as a means of mediating for the other criteria, but it is these criteria that have been used to adjudicate the tradition. In other words, one must establish authentic sayings apart from the criterion of plausibility (that is, on the basis of the traditional criteria) in order to use this supposed new criterion."¹⁹⁷ Porter thus remains unconvinced that Theissen has offered anything new because Theissen's new criteria do not break free from the traditional criteria of authenticity.

In his study, Porter provides a detailed and thorough analysis of the criteria's development before, during, and after form and redaction criticism. Because he remains unconvinced of the value of both the traditional criteria and the more recent proposals above, he introduces three new criteria based on arguments favoring Jesus's use of Greek. Porter's Greek language criteria are certainly innovative but they have not received broad approval.

195 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 116. Immediately following this summary Porter says "This is one of the most important insights, it seems to me, that Theissen develops in his book, and is worth considering for any similar attempt at explanation of data" (116–17).

196 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 121. Gerd Häfner arrives at essentially the same conclusion for Theissen's and Winter's new criterion: "Das historische Plausibilitätskriterium bietet kein wesentlich neues Kriterium der Rückfrage nach Jesus" (Gerd Häfner, "Das Ende der Kriterien? Jesusforschung angesichts der geschichtstheoretischen Diskussion," in *Historiographie und fiktionales Erzählen: zur Konstruktivität in Geschichtstheorie und Exegese*, ed. Knut Backhaus and Gerd Häfner [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007], 97–130, at 126).

197 Porter, *Criteria*, 122.

After his 2000 monograph Porter returned to the criteria in the magisterial *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* which he co-edited with Tom Holmén in 2011.¹⁹⁸ Porter acknowledges that NT scholars developed criteria like dissimilarity, Semitic language phenomena, least distinctiveness, multiple attestation, and embarrassment before the advent of form criticism, but it was within form criticism these criteria rose to prominence.¹⁹⁹ The most relevant contribution of his chapter for our purposes is the discussion of the criteria in other historical disciplines. Porter admits he has not exhausted the methods of general historians, but in the three whose works he reviews he observes “it appears that one of the major observable facts regarding the criteria of authenticity and their use in historical Jesus research is that they are essentially confined to use within this discipline, rather than finding acceptance outside the field of New Testament studies.”²⁰⁰ According to Porter some of the criteria might catch the ire of American historian David Hackett Fischer, whose famous work *Historians’ Fallacies* continues to steer would-be historians from logical fallacies and methodological infelicities.²⁰¹ Porter also observes that general historians—at least the three whose work he reviewed—do not use terminology like “criteria of authenticity.”²⁰² Although this is somewhat true (though see chapter 2), this is a fairly weak argument against the criteria as used by Jesus researchers. Like their counterparts in NT studies, the modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity whose work Porter reviews consistently underscore the value of working with the Gospels as one would work with secular

198 Stanley E. Porter, “The Criteria of Authenticity,” in *HSHJ*, 2:695–714.

199 Porter, “Criteria,” *HSHJ*, 2:694–700.

200 Porter, “Criteria,” *HSHJ*, 2:700.

201 David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). Porter believes the criterion of double dissimilarity might violate Fischer’s fallacy of many questions or of contradictory questions (cf. Fischer, 8, 34). Least distinctiveness might be guilty of the reductive fallacy which demands “a linear approach to the development of literary forms, or generalization” (Porter “Criteria,” *HSHJ*, 2:701, citing Fischer, 172–75). Lastly, the criterion of Semitic language could be guilty of begging the question or creating a false dichotomy. Within Jesus research, even proponents of the criteria think *ḏḏ* should be abandoned (see the discussion above), and the criteria of least distinctiveness and Semitic language are hardly key criteria in use today (cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:178–83).

202 Porter, “Criteria,” *HSHJ*, 2:700, 703. Porter reviews the following: T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (London: SCM, 1917); Robin Lane Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (New York: Knopf, 1992); and Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels* (New York: Scribners, 1977). See my response to Porter’s concerns at the beginning of chapter 3 below and my review of Lane Fox’s and Grant’s method in the excursus at the end of chapter 3.

historical documents,²⁰³ and they highlight the importance of understanding Jesus in his native context; the terminology for the methods is largely irrelevant if the methods are much the same—a point I will demonstrate in the following chapter. Porter closes by once again rehearsing the development of the criteria of authenticity within form criticism, and, having critically evaluated several of the standard criteria, he concludes they are unable to yield enduring results for Jesus research.

Porter is by no means alone in his critiques of the criteria. Prior to the publication of *JCDA*, several of the contributors were already rejecting one or more criteria and/or turning toward other methods entirely.²⁰⁴ Rafael Rodríguez wastes no time inveighing against the criteria in his short but sharply critical article on the misuse of the criteria. He lambasts the criteria's penchant for serving merely as “vehicles of subjectivity”²⁰⁵ rather than providing a truly objective method. There are, he claims, two factors driving scholars toward criteria. First is the nature of historiography: as a “critical enterprise, the historian's stance *vis-à-vis* her sources is typically sceptical.”²⁰⁶ Skepticism is a hermeneutical principle and Rodríguez briefly surveys three views on skepticism found in Wright, Meier, and the Jesus Seminar.²⁰⁷ Despite the overtures to skepticism and lip-service paid to objectivity in scholarship, Rodríguez bemoans the fact that the application of the criteria is nevertheless fraught with difficulties:

We can (and ought to) strive to be critically aware of ourselves—our presuppositions and assumptions—and to base our analyses of evidentiary argumentation. But even self-reflective critics (as are, for example, Sanders, Meier, Fredriksen, and a host of others) are not ‘objective’ historians, no matter how rigorously or consistently they employ the criteria of authenticity.²⁰⁸

Rodríguez is undoubtedly correct, for no scholar is totally objective. That being said, at this point in the article one begins to wonder if objectivity is

203 See, e.g., Glover, 17, cited in Porter, “Criteria,” *HSHJ*, 2:702.

204 See, e.g., the reliance on social memory theory in the following works: Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2009); Rafael Rodríguez, *Structuring Early Christian Memory: Jesus in Tradition, Performance and Text*, LNTS 407 (London: T&T Clark, 2010); and more recently, idem, *Jesus Darkly* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018).

205 Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” at 157 and 167.

206 Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” 154.

207 N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 63–64; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:1–2, *passim*; Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, 5.

208 Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” 156.

an all-or-nothing proposition, or if Rodríguez believes the majority of Jesus researchers operate as if the criteria can perfectly restrain their subjectivity. After noting how the criteria cannot make good on their promise of objectivity, Rodríguez paints an increasingly dark picture of the status of the criteria as he concludes—and endeavors to show in what follows—that “the criteria of authenticity function as vehicles of our subjectivities rather than checks against them. Inasmuch as they provide handles on our presuppositions they retain some value, but they do not help scholars distinguish ‘authentic’ from ‘inauthentic’ traditions.”²⁰⁹ It should be clear here that Rodríguez is criticizing the misuse, perhaps even the abuse, of concepts like “authenticity.” Curiously, based on how opponents of the criteria describe it, the concept of authenticity seemingly means proven beyond the shadow of a doubt. But other those who *critically* accept criteria do not share this view.²¹⁰ At the close of this section Rodríguez cites Dunn who believes the continued discussion about the criteria since the 1960s has ultimately shown only their inadequacy as a historical method.²¹¹

More positively, Rodríguez believes there may still be a way forward that could include the criteria, and he points to works by Sanders, Wright, and Allison to light the way.²¹² These scholars use the criteria after establishing a broader basis of facts by other means. That way, the criteria are placed in their proper context, no longer as tools attempting to bear the weight of assessing authenticity or inauthenticity, but as one component of broader historiographic argumentation.²¹³

Rodríguez offers two additional words of caution. First, appealing to the work on orality by Elizabeth Tonkin, he urges Jesus researchers not to fall prey to either-or thinking regarding authenticity.²¹⁴ Second, what may be interpreted as *dissimilar* from its first-century Palestinian milieu may have no

209 Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” 157.

210 See the several remarks above from scholars in the “Critical but Accepting” category.

211 Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 97.

212 See, e.g., Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*; Wright, *People of God*; Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987).

213 Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” 162.

214 Rodríguez cites Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6, on 162n.42. Elsewhere, Rodríguez urges, “The most important thing [NT scholars] can say about memory, then, is that we need to get away from an either/or approach to memory and authenticity: *either* an event happened *or* it didn’t. There are multiple ways to recount the past; in fact, there are multiple ways to recount the past authentically” (*Jesus Darkly* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2018], 158). His point is well taken, although this statement may ring with a hint of hyperbole, for there are undoubtedly significant instances in the life of Jesus when it is by no

bearing whatsoever on its authenticity.²¹⁵ Both of these warnings lead Rodríguez to conclude that historians of Jesus need to pay greater attention to the ways exegesis sways judgments of authenticity.

As helpful as these cautions are, Rodríguez omits consideration of the rationales behind the various criteria. He rightly warns historians “deal here with probabilities rather than certainties, and therefore a more provisional use of the criteria is warranted rather than the flat declaration ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic.’”²¹⁶ However, in light of the reviews above, it should be clear that most Jesus researchers who accept the criteria as valid tools use them precisely in the way Rodríguez has described. Indeed, the reviews thus far in this chapter have demonstrated the consistent, decades-long calls for caution in employing the criteria, a fact that should temper some of Rodríguez’s otherwise valuable criticism. Despite some nuance toward the proper place of the criteria, then, Rodríguez concludes his article with the harsh declaration: the criteria ultimately serve as vehicles of subjectivity which enable scholars to peer back not to the historical Jesus but merely into the mind of the exegete.

Two years later, Dale Allison’s “How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity”²¹⁷ opened the four-volume *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*; it is interesting, and perhaps somewhat telling, that the opening chapter dealt with the criteria for historical-Jesus study. Allison recommends that scholars should give up trying to revamp existing criteria and instead they should displace them from the center of their method and experiment with new methods. He defends seven theses or “propositions” of his own in order to make his case.²¹⁸ For the sake of space all seven need not be rehearsed here in detail. Most importantly, Allison contends the criteria are often mutually contradictory (proposition iii), they have not produced scholarly consensus (ii) nor can they even resist misuse (vi) and in fact, they are based on a wrong-headed, atomistic approach to studying the life and teachings of Jesus which must be abandoned (vii).²¹⁹ Allison presses hardest with this last critique: to argue that Jesus’s earliest followers accurately recorded his words yet came

means unimportant an event did or did not happen—a point with which Rodríguez would certainly agree.

215 Rodríguez examines a recent discussion of Jesus’s statement that the dead should bury their dead on pp. 164–65.

216 Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” 166.

217 Allison, “Marginalize.” Allison began questioning the criteria prior to “Marginalize”; cf. *Constructing Jesus*, 10n.52. “Marginalize” adequately represents his views of the criteria.

218 Allison, “Marginalize,” 9–21. Compare the use of seven theses in Holmén, “Seven Theses.”

219 Allison, “Marginalize,” 9, also states that even if Jesus said or did something, we cannot hope to prove he said or did something and the criteria cannot guarantee us we can (i); use of the criteria presupposes “there is a clear distinction between what is authentic and

away with a false impression of him pushes the historian beyond the point of incredulity and into utter despair of ever finding anything historical about the historical Jesus.

If the tradents of the Jesus tradition got the big picture or the larger patterns wrong they also got the details—that is, the sentences—wrong. It is precarious to urge that we can find the truth about Jesus on the basis of a few dozen sayings deemed to be authentic if those sayings are interpreted contrary to the general impressions conveyed by the early tradition in its entirety.²²⁰

To operate in this manner, Allison argues, is to fall into inescapable skepticism.

To address these general concerns, Allison proposes what he believes is a more helpful tool: a criterion of recurrent attestation.²²¹ Individual sayings or actions are, as Allison has hoped to show, beyond our ability to authenticate; if there is any hope in presenting a compelling, plausible portrait of the historical Jesus, it must be based on a broader swath of material and traditions, not an isolated saying or two. He continues, “[c]ertain themes and motifs and rhetorical strategies are consistently attested over a wide range of material. Surely it is in these themes and motifs and rhetorical strategies, if it is anywhere, that we are likely to have some good memories.”²²² Allison illustrates recurrent attestation by examining the theme of Jesus’s power over Satan and demonic forces: the idea that Jesus and his disciples saw his ministry as a decisive action against Satan and evil spirits appears throughout the Gospels,²²³

what is not, which is a very misleading proposition”; and finally, most scholars have not used the criteria consistently (v)—which is related to (vi) above.

220 Allison, “Marginalize,” 21.

221 A brief word regarding the timeline of when recurrent attestation was proposed in the early 2000s is appropriate. Holmén briefly touches on it (see above) but cites Allison in his then forthcoming chapter “Marginalize” in *HSJ* as the one who “now puts forward [the recurrent attestation principle] as an alternative to the standard criteria of authenticity” (Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 370). Holmén was able to cite Allison’s chapter in *HSJ* since he served as co-editor with Porter for *HSJ*. Holmén published “Seven Theses” two years before Allison’s *Constructing Jesus* which was released, in which Allison also presents recurrent attestation (*Constructing Jesus*, 17–21).

222 Allison, “Marginalize,” 22.

223 Allison assembles an impressive collection of traditions in the synoptics: 1) The temptation story, in which Jesus bests the devil; Mark 1:12–13; Matt 4:1–11 = Luke 4:1–13 (Q). 2) Stories of successful exorcism; Mark 1:21–28; 5:1–20; 7:24–30; 9:14–20; Matt 12:22–23 = Luke 11:14 (Q); Matt 9:32–34; cf. the passing notices of successful exorcisms in Mark 1:32, 34, 39; 3:22; Matt 8:16; Luke 13:32. 3) Jesus’ authorization of disciples to cast out demons; Mark 3:15; 6:7; cf. 6:13; Matt 7:22; Luke 10:19–20. 4) Saying about Satan being divided;

as do other themes and motifs.²²⁴ What matters for Allison, then, is replication, if a theme or motif occurs throughout the entire tradition with the result that a general but nonetheless accurate impression of Jesus emerges. In light of these recurring themes Allison argues that either these traditions actually point us toward the kinds of things Jesus was believed to say and do, or we can know nothing about Jesus and should abandon ever trying to know anything about him. The focus, therefore, lies upon thematic recurrence throughout the entire tradition, not on attestation in multiple sources—though perhaps, by happenstance, in multiple forms. The metaphor of impressionistic artwork is apropos: the image that emerges in an impressionistic painting like Claude Monet's "Impression, Sunrise" is a general representation of a scene or a place, even a time of day; likewise, we should look to these general impressions of Jesus (exorcist, healer, teacher, etc.) with greater confidence in our ability to make historical assertions, not to small, isolated units.²²⁵

Recurrent attestation serves as part of Allison's methodological complex, which includes two other processes. First, if one is to isolate recurring themes, "we will need to correlate those themes and motifs and rhetorical strategies with whatever circumstances about his life we can recover with assurance."²²⁶ The circumstances he has in mind are the rough dates for Jesus's life, his baptism by John, his final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, and his arrest, trial, and execution by the Romans. The recurring themes must be viewed in conjunction with these historical facts.²²⁷ Second, Allison believes the evidence for Jesus's life and work allows scholars "to posit a general religious type for Jesus ... as apocalyptic prophet."²²⁸ On the basis of multiple attestation—somewhat surprisingly—Allison believes scholars are on firm ground for viewing Jesus's

Mark 3:23–27; Matt 12:25–27 = Luke 11:17–19 (Q). 5) Parable of binding the strong man; Mark 3:28; Matt 12:29 = Luke 11:21–22 (Q); Gos. Thom. 35. 6) Story of someone other than a disciple casting out demons in Jesus' name; Mark 9:38–41. 7) Declaration that Jesus casts out demons by the finger/Spirit of God; Matt 12:28 = Luke 11:20 (Q). 8) Report of Jesus' vision of Satan fall like lightning from heaven; Luke 10:18. Similar material can even be found in John: 9) Announcement that the ruler of the world has been driven out; John 12:31; 16:11 (cf. 14:30), ("Marginalize," 22–23).

224 See Allison, "Marginalize," 23–24, for the eight themes and motifs he lists. Verse citations for each are found on 24, footnotes 45–52.

225 Allison, "Marginalize," 25.

226 Allison, "Marginalize," 26.

227 Cf. a similar approach of basing assertions about Jesus's life on a bedrock of historical facts in Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, especially 1–13.

228 Allison, "Marginalize," 26.

words and actions and the responses of his followers to his words and actions through the paradigm of apocalyptic and eschatological expectation.²²⁹

Allison's conclusion is sobering but straightforward: "I believe that we need to admit that, as historians of the Jesus tradition, we are story-tellers. We can do no more than aspire to fashion a hypothetical narrative that is more persuasive than competing narratives, one that satisfies our aesthetical and historical sensibilities because of its apparent ability to clarify more data in a more satisfactory fashion than its rivals."²³⁰ A narrative of this kind will necessarily comprise general impressions (derived from the tradition) based on a bedrock of historical facts about Jesus which, in turn, will serve to explain the apocalyptic paradigm present from the beginning of Jesus's ministry.

Although much of Allison's critiques are quite sensible, his presentation of the criteria tends toward an "all or nothing" approach, not unlike Rodríguez's: either all the criteria are always helpful or they are unhelpful. His discussion of the criteria's rationales is at best perfunctory, and yet he cannot seem to escape the allure of appealing to a criterion when it strengthens his case, thus making him guilty of one his complaints earlier.²³¹ In his argument for positing Jesus as the religious type "apocalyptic prophet," for which there is indeed ample evidence, Allison is quite comfortable appealing to multiple attestation.²³² The application of multiple attestation in this instance also raises the question of how Allison proposes to ascertain "whatever circumstances about [Jesus's] life we can recover with assurance." In other words, how can historians confidently point to Jesus's baptism by John or his execution by the Romans if not by means of a critical application of one or more of the very criteria Allison wishes to marginalize?

In 2002 the John, Jesus, and History seminar began and the ensuing publications are a veritable treasure trove of critical appraisals on the use of the Gospel of John for Jesus research.²³³ The aim of this project has been to correct the (wrongful) exclusion of the Gospel of John from reasoned and critical

229 Allison, "Marginalize," 28.

230 Allison, "Marginalize," 30.

231 Cf. Allison, "Marginalize," proposition v, (9, 15–18).

232 Allison, "Marginalize," 28.

233 The results of this extraordinary collection of presentations and essays from an impressive array of scholars can be found more fully in the current three volumes of the John, Jesus, and History seminar, with additional volumes forthcoming (Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, vol. 1 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007); Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, vol. 2 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2009); Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, vol. 3

life of Jesus research.²³⁴ Anderson has rightly warned against exaggerating the historicity of the Gospel of John due to eyewitness claims (John 19:34–35; 21:24–25), but overstating John's ahistoricity is equally problematic because the de-historicization of John leads to the de-Johannification of Jesus.²³⁵ Modernist approaches should be critically evaluated and the resulting method of critically investigating the literary, historical, and theological issues of the Fourth Gospel will feature a complex of the best practices from modernist and postmodernist approaches.²³⁶ In the third volume of *JJH*, which contains essays from 2008–11 (published 2016), Paul Anderson and Jamie Clark-Soles offer some initial steps toward generating a complex and robust method designed, so to speak, to level the playing field for investigating the Gospel of John. They observe that “given that the criteria for determining historicity within the Gospels have largely been designed to favor synoptic features over and against Johannine ones, new criteria for determining gospel historicity are required.”²³⁷ An analogue thus emerges with inclusion at its core: as the Gospel of John merits inclusion in Jesus research, so more inclusive criteria need to be developed.

Anderson and Clark-Soles recommend four criteria, and these are framed as new criteria which supplant the standard criteria—hence their inclusion here in this third stream of responses to the criteria.²³⁸ First is *corroborative impression versus multiple attestation*. Multiple attestation can overlook one or multiple evangelists' augmentations or corrections of another evangelist. For this reason, “corroborative sets of impressions, wherein paraphrases, alternative ways of putting something, or distinctive renderings of a similar feature” would generate a more comprehensive understanding of Jesus's work,

(Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2016)). From here on, published volumes of the John, Jesus, and History Project are abbreviated *JJH*.

234 See, e.g., the introductory essays Tom Thatcher, “Introduction: The John, Jesus, and History Project,” in *JJH* 1, 9–12; and Paul N. Anderson, “Why This Study Is Needed, and Why It Is Needed Now,” in *JJH* 1, 13–70. Along similar lines, see the correctives offered in James H. Charlesworth, “From Old to New: Paradigm Shifts Concerning Judaism, the Gospel of John, Jesus, and the Advent of ‘Christianity,’” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective. The First Princeton-Prague Symposium on Jesus Research*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorný, Princeton-Prague Symposia Series on the Historical Jesus 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 56–72, especially 59–66.

235 Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 177.

236 Anderson, *Modern Foundations*, 180.

237 Paul N. Anderson and Jaime Clark-Soles, “Introduction and Overview,” in *JJH* 3, 1–25, at 18–19.

238 For all references and quotations in this paragraph, see Anderson and Clark-Soles, “Introduction and Overview,” in *JJH* 1, at 18–19.

and “would thus include the Johannine witness rather than excluding it programmatically.” Second, Anderson and Clark-Soles prefer *primitivity versus dissimilarity and embarrassment*. The (negative) use of dissimilarity excludes the possibility that “apostolic Christians and their successors *actually did get something right* in their memories of Jesus” (original emphasis). Instead, Jesus researchers should “seek to identify primitive material, seeking to distinguish it from its more developed counterparts. This may include Palestine-familiarity features, Aramaic and Hebraic terms, and other undeveloped material less influenced by the later mission to the Gentiles.” Third, historical inquiry can easily be undermined by dogmatism of various kinds, hence the urging for *critical realism versus dogmatic naturalism or supranaturalism*. Wondrous (i.e. miraculous) claims can present difficulties for historians, but these difficulties are not insurmountable if approached from a genuinely critical realist perspective that can take into account cognitive, religious, social, and other aspects of realism which lead to such claims. Fourth, an *open coherence versus closed portraiture* can overcome the circularity of standard coherence-based criteria. To conclude, Anderson and Clark-Soles warmly welcome the production of new criteria which can operate with the Gospel of John as well as with the synoptic tradition.

Le Donne is included in this category of “Rejecting the Criteria” due to his association with *JCDA*, but in fairness to him he finds a modicum of value in the criteria provided they are used as one (minor) component of a more robust historiography (not unlike Allison above). In his 2009 monograph Le Donne argues that the historian “attempts to establish whether a story originated in the perceptions contemporary to the historical event,” that is, does the story in question originate in one’s contemporary perception or one’s imagination.²³⁹ Le Donne is careful not to argue the historian’s task is to uncover the event behind a given memory; in fact, it seems Le Donne does not believe historians can move from memory-stories to events. Rather, the “historian’s aim is to account for the earliest mnemonic refractions of a memory-story,”²⁴⁰ that is to determine what are the earliest *memories* of a given person or event but not to discover anything about the historical person or event. To do this, Le Donne believes multiple attestation, embarrassment, contrary tendency, multiple forms, coherence, and the dual Semitisms and Semitic influence have quite

239 Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2009), 87.

240 Cf. Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus*, 41–80, for his discussion of history and memory refractions. Refractions are, essentially, variations or distortions of memory. See also Rodríguez, *Jesus Darkly*, 77–82.

limited value. Multiple attestation and embarrassment are two of the stronger criteria, but these seven criteria, he reiterates, are simply one component of his larger typologically-rooted historiographic method which focuses more broadly “to distinguish between memory and invention.”²⁴¹

Following Le Donne, Keith’s “Memory and Authenticity” (2011) provided the initial impetus for *JCDA*. In his 2011 article, Keith has two aims. First, he demonstrates the criteria’s indebtedness to form criticism and, in light of form criticism’s problematic foundations, Keith sees no benefit in continuing with a criteria-based approach.²⁴² Second, he argues the social memory approach, where one takes into account the complex social processes involved in remembering and transmitting memory, provides the way forward.²⁴³

The growing skepticism and mounting frustration with the criteria and their results beginning with Hooker in the 1970s (and to a lesser degree with Calvert) culminated in 2012 with the publication of *JCDA* and the confident pronouncement that the criteria have failed. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne joined forces with several others who were disillusioned with the results of the criteria-based approach and published what they believed to be the criteria’s obituary. The “demise of authenticity” and the criteria is now assumed by some.²⁴⁴ Le Donne opens this volume with a resounding “call for an end to the traditional methods employed by Jesus historians,”²⁴⁵ i.e. the criteria-based approach. The notion of “authenticity” arose in a time when historical positivism was the reigning paradigm of historians and although Jesus historians today do not in theory espouse positivism, Le Donne believes in practice far too many operate as if they do, using criteria which they admit with increasing frequency are problematic. Le Donne and the contributors, therefore, wish to expose the numerous flaws in theory and practice with the criteria and believe “this exposure should lead to a programmatic shift in our historiographical methods.”²⁴⁶

Le Donne also furthers Keith’s concerns by examining two main methodological trajectories in Jesus research: 1) the development of the criteria both within form criticism and outside of form criticism; and 2) the intellectual

241 Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus*, 91.

242 Keith, “Memory and Authenticity,” 155–65.

243 Keith, “Memory and Authenticity,” 165–76.

244 The title of the following is indicative: Jonathan Bernier, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus After the Demise of Authenticity*, LNTS 540 (London: T&T Clark, 2016). Bernier speaks freely of the criteria’s, and therefore authenticity’s, downfall: 10, 40–41.

245 Anthony Le Donne, “The Rise of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus: An Introduction to the Crumbling Foundations of Jesus Research,” in *JCDA*, 3–21, at 3.

246 Le Donne, “Crumbling Foundations,” 5.

history of the concept of authenticity from its German roots and development within American biblicism. Le Donne states “In many ways, the field of historical Jesus research is a reaction to both sides of this controversy,”²⁴⁷ with the result that many NT scholars are dissatisfied and disillusioned with the traditional criteria-based approach.

Keith’s chapter in *JCDA* begins with an appeal to Morna Hooker’s criticisms of the criteria from the 1970s.²⁴⁸ After the fall of form criticism, according to Keith, the criteria of authenticity became “little more than historiographical means of accomplishing the form-critical task” of separating authentic and inauthentic material.²⁴⁹ Once again, he argues, because the criteria were founded and/or developed within form criticism they cannot serve as a viable method for Jesus research.

Next, Keith surveys three recent attempts to rework various criteria. First he summarizes Wright’s criterion of double similarity/dissimilarity.²⁵⁰ Keith applauds Wright’s attempts to take seriously the interrelation of history and interpreted story, but ultimately Keith believes Wright has not gone far enough. Keith has even higher praise for Theissen and Winter’s rebuttal of dissimilarity and finds their robust criterion of historical plausibility admirable, yet he still finds fault with their reliance on the traditional criteria.²⁵¹ Lastly, Keith turns to Le Donne’s work on social memory, believing Le Donne’s “larger project of triangulation of memory refractions provides a strong possibility for where historical Jesus scholars can go if/once they dispense with the criteria of authenticity.”²⁵² Although Keith believes Le Donne is not without critique,²⁵³ he nonetheless appreciates Le Donne’s social memory approach.

The most robust chapter in *JCDA* is Jens Schröter’s on the criteria and historiographic method.²⁵⁴ Schröter examines the criteria and their relation to general historiographic method in order to demonstrate further the problematic nature of the criteria as a method for historical investigation and presentation. Citing Keith’s article from a year earlier, Schröter also locates the source of the

247 Le Donne, “Crumbling Foundations,” 6–17, quote from 17.

248 Keith refers to Hooker’s “Christology and Methodology” and “Wrong Tool.”

249 Keith, “Indebtedness,” 36.

250 Wright, *Victory of God*, 131–33.

251 Keith, “Indebtedness,” 42. Compare with Porter’s similar complaints against Theissen and Winter.

252 Keith, “Indebtedness,” 45.

253 Keith, “Indebtedness,” 46, and 46n.90.

254 Jens Schröter, “The Criteria of Authenticity in Jesus Research and Historiographical Method,” in *JCDA*, 49–70.

criteria's failure in their origination and development within form criticism.²⁵⁵ Form criticism sought to ascertain authentic materials through the use of criteria which, in effect, isolated individual sayings from their broader narrative and socio-cultural contexts. Historians of Jesus began to use the criteria "to secure a minimum of 'authentic' Jesus tradition in distinction from its interpretation in earliest Christianity and at the same time from ancient Judaism as the cultural and religious context of Jesus."²⁵⁶ Schröter argues that if the criteria are to be used at all they should be seen as one component of a broader historiographic method, due in large part to their inherent limitations.²⁵⁷ These limitations are evident in the work of Käsemann and Crossan.²⁵⁸ The criteria, used independently of other guiding principles or methods, only seem like an objective tool, but ultimately serve as masks for general and subjective judgments.²⁵⁹ Schröter therefore submits that

what is needed is an outline of Jesus' activity as a basis upon which the principal rules and individual criteria for evaluation of the Jesus tradition can be applied. The general sketch on the one hand and the concrete rules and criteria on the other hand would therefore stand in complex interdependence with each other and form a methodological circle for the reconstruction of the historical Jesus.²⁶⁰

Schröter's recommendation is thoroughly reasonable, but he may unwittingly beg the question: how does one generate a general outline of Jesus's activity apart from multiple (and recurrent) attestation?

255 Compare this line of argumentation with Porter who shows that certain criteria did not originate within form criticism, although they were later adopted to form criticism (82–99).

256 Schröter, "Historiographical Method," 54.

257 Schröter, "Historiographical Method," 55. Here Schröter builds on the work of Hooker and Ferdinand Hahn ("Methodologische Überlegungen zur Rückfrage nach Jesus," in *Studien zum neuen Testament 1: Grundsatzfragen, Jesusforschung, Evangelien*, ed. Jörg Frey and Julianne Schlegel, WUNT 2/191 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 185–251; ET: "Methodological Reflections on the Historical Investigation of Jesus," in *Historical Investigation and New Testament Faith: Two Essays*, ed. Edgar Krentz, trans. Robert Maddox [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 36–50).

258 Schröter, "Historiographical Method," 57–58, describes Käsemann's work generally but specifically cites Crossan, *Historical Jesus*.

259 Cf. Rodríguez, "Authenticating Criteria," especially 157 and 167.

260 Schröter, "Historiographical Method," 55.

One of the strengths of Schröter's article is his (albeit brief) engagement with the philosophy of historiography as well as his treatment of general historiographic method; few who critique the criteria and who wish to bring NT historiographic method in line with general historiography actually engage such studies to any substantial degree. According to Schröter, the criteria are powerless to deal satisfactorily with the interconnectedness of events, remains, and representations of those events; only a method of historiography that takes these into account and appreciates that interpretation is also part of the historical record can truly suffice to yield a compelling portrait of Jesus.

Chapters 3 through 7 in *JCDA* detail the following criteria, respectively: Semitic influence on Greek;²⁶¹ coherence;²⁶² dissimilarity;²⁶³ embarrassment;²⁶⁴ and multiple attestation.²⁶⁵ Loren Stuckenbruck argues Semitic influence on Greek as a criterion cannot help. Le Donne concludes Norman Perrin's rendition of coherence should be rejected, and although Meier's might be helpful it still merits critique. Le Donne urges, "Jesus studies would do well to recognize that the ever-shifting social frames of memory required a matrix and continuum of coherence. Thus, it is probable that the social dynamics at work in the Jesus tradition vacillated and cross-pollinated along multiple trajectories, achieving coherence within each cognitive state and each social set to propel the identity-shaping elements of the tradition forward."²⁶⁶ Thus, the complex reality of memory negates the facile bifurcation of historical tradition into categories of authentic or inauthentic. Winter flatly concludes dissimilarity "cannot deliver authenticity,"²⁶⁷ and the inherent uncertainty of historical knowledge forbids a new fundamentalism to rise in its place. What can help is understanding the degrees of plausibility inherent in historical Jesus research which mitigates total skepticism or certainty. With his typical energy, Rodríguez presses hard in his conclusions, underscoring not just the trouble with the criterion of embarrassment but the trouble of the entire criteria-based approach. He insists that Jesus research should focus on the larger picture and

261 Loren Stuckenbruck, "Semitic Influence on Greek': An Authenticating Criterion in Jesus Research?," in *JCDA*, 73–94.

262 Anthony Le Donne, "The Criterion of Coherence: Its Development, Inevitability, and Historiographical Limitations," in *JCDA*, 95–114.

263 Dagmar Winter, "Saving the Quest for Authenticity from the Criterion of Dissimilarity: History and Plausibility," in *JCDA*, 115–31.

264 Rafael Rodríguez, "The Embarrassing Truth About Jesus: The Criterion of Embarrassment and the Failure of Historical Authenticity," in *JCDA*, 132–51.

265 Mark Goodacre, "Criticizing the Criterion of Multiple Attestation: The Historical Jesus and the Question of Sources," in *JCDA*, 152–67.

266 Le Donne, "Coherence," 113.

267 Winter, "Dissimilarity," 131.

general impression of Jesus from the sources we have (referring to Allison's work on recurrent attestation, as well as work by Richard Horsley,²⁶⁸ Dunn,²⁶⁹ and Le Donne²⁷⁰), not particular sayings lifted out of their context. Rodríguez thus argues that a focus on memory and how memories are transmitted can pave the way forward. Goodacre concludes multiple attestation, as it is often applied to the Gospels, is built on a wrongheaded solution to the Synoptic Problem. He believes examples like Jesus's inability to perform miracles "in fact argue against the use of multiple attestation as a criterion in Jesus research."²⁷¹ Where Matthew and Luke seem not to include this limitation of Jesus's power, Mark does. Goodacre argues "Unpalatable traditions about Jesus may have had a shorter life-span than traditions that cohered with the tradents' best expectations. Rather than multiple attestation, it will sometimes be single attestation that points to historicity, those rare nuggets of primitive material that Mark is able to recount before later Christians write their accounts without reference to them."²⁷² Accordingly, Goodacre warns against not taking the Synoptic Problem seriously enough in Jesus research, for how one addresses the Synoptic Problem has a major effect on how one carries on their historical research.²⁷³

The problems with the criteria have been thoroughly documented and discussed from the 1960s to the present. Although earlier voices like Walker noted some issues with the rationales and applications of the criteria, Hooker was one of the first to cast serious doubt on the criteria's utility, and since then others have raised increasingly sharper critiques. Holmén and Porter claim the criteria of authenticity are idiosyncratic and unique to NT studies,²⁷⁴ and Porter believes attempts to offer new criteria or revamp others have proven ineffective. The mounting frustration with the criteria reached a tipping point with the publication of *JCDA* in 2012 where the contributors marginalized or rejected the standard criteria and/or the notion of "authenticity." So influential were these arguments that the default position of some scholars today is

268 Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

269 Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*.

270 Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus*.

271 Goodacre, "Multiple Attestation," 167.

272 Goodacre, "Multiple Attestation," 167. Surprisingly (or not since I argue the principles underlying the criteria approach are inherent to historiography), one might see a hint of the criterion of embarrassment in Goodacre's explanation here.

273 Cf. Dale Allison's chapter in *JCDA* (chapter 9 "It Don't Come Easy: A History Of Disillusionment," pp. 186–99) on the disaffection engendered by the criteria-based approach, which is largely a recapitulation of remarks he has made in "Marginalize," and also in his *Constructing Jesus*, is one of *JCDA*'s concluding chapters.

274 Holmén, "Doubts," 79 and 79n.122; Porter, "Criteria of Authenticity," *DJG* 2, 153.

to accept the demise of authenticity. Jonathan Bernier's 2016 monograph, for example, begins with the premise that the particular notion of "authenticity" inherent to the criteria approach has been soundly dismantled.

2.4 *Responses to Rejecting the Criteria: The Conversation Continues*

Despite the apparent strength of the arguments against the criteria approach it is unclear if the majority of Jesus researchers have abandoned the criteria altogether, for the shift in consensus may only be apparent.²⁷⁵ Echoing his opening statement in volume 1 of *A Marginal Jew*,²⁷⁶ the late John Meier reiterates the historical method driving his work in his introduction to volume v. He argues,

At a university, the quest for the *historical* Jesus (if we are serious about the adjective 'historical') is properly housed in the department of *history*. Accordingly, the quest is obliged to follow the methods and criteria (i.e., rules or guidelines for making intellectual judgments) appropriate to sober academic history.²⁷⁷

The historical Jesus should not be confused with the real Jesus because the latter is infinitely more complex than what can be said with confidence about the former; rather, the historian aims for an accurate approximation of Jesus's life and teaching based on the evidence available. Meier aims to do this in this fifth volume in the same manner as the previous four, with careful exegetical work and clearly defined criteria.²⁷⁸ In the nearly thirty years these volumes span, scholarly opinion on the criteria has soured: Rodríguez, for example,

²⁷⁵ As social memory approaches gained prominence in the early 2000s, in the decade that followed there was some pushback against the usefulness of memory studies. See the discussion in the following series of articles: Paul Foster, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research," *JSHJ* 10.3 (2012): 191–227; Stanley E. Porter and Hughson T. Ong, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: A Response to Paul Foster with Further Comments for Future Discussion," *JSHJ* 12.1/2 (2014): 143–64; Paul Foster, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: An Ongoing Conversation with Stan Porter and Hughson T. Ong," *JSHJ* 12.1/2 (2014): 165–83.

²⁷⁶ Meier says he will use the "scientific tools of modern historical research," (*Marginal Jew*, 1:1).

²⁷⁷ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, v:9 (italics original).

²⁷⁸ Meier says, "To be sure, I fully acknowledge both the limitations of our sources and the constant danger of bias and self-projection on the part of the historian. But these limitations and dangers are precisely what make careful historical-critical exegesis plus the application of clearly enunciated criteria of historicity (as opposed, say, to personal intuition or a 'relevant' social or political agenda) indispensable as a hedge against irresponsible or ideologically driven claims about the historical Jesus," (*Marginal Jew*, v:11).

finds Meier's method to be passé.²⁷⁹ Meier, in turn, responds directly to Allison, Theissen and Winter, and others who have advocated for abandoning the criteria,²⁸⁰ arguing forcefully that Allison et al sought within the criteria a certainty never to be had in the first place. He quips "That the use of criteria has not resulted in worldwide scholarly agreement on the historical Jesus will surprise only those who are also surprised by the fact that more than a century of minute study of the Synoptic Gospels has not led all scholars to adopt a single solution to the Synoptic Problem."²⁸¹ Along similar lines Michael Licona argues with force and verve that the criteria are implicit in any attempt to write about the historical Jesus,²⁸² a point I demonstrate repeatedly in chapters 2 through 4 below. Licona has challenged the *JCDA* contributors to tell if they believe, for example, Jesus was crucified and died as a result and, if so, how they arrived at that conclusion apart from employing certain criteria.²⁸³

From the majority of studies reviewed, whether favorable to or critical of the criteria, Theissen and Schröter are rare exceptions as they have engaged with general historiographic method and the philosophy of historiography.²⁸⁴

279 "[Meier's] goal for the project, then, was 'as much as possible to let any overarching interpretation of Jesus and his work emerge gradually and naturally out of the convergence of the data judged historical' [Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:10]. This approach extends throughout *A Marginal Jew* without any significant update, despite significant changes in the historical study of Jesus over the last two decades," ("Embarrassing Truth," 148). On 148n.70 Rodríguez cites several memory-based historical studies as evidence of "significant changes in the historical study of Jesus."

280 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, v:27–28n.28, refers to Allison, *Constructing Jesus*; idem, "Marginalize,"; Keith and Le Donne's *JCDA*; and Theissen and Winter, *Plausible*. I have argued above, however, that Theissen's criterion of historical plausibility fits him comfortably in the "critical but accepting; offers new/revised" category.

281 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, v:17. Sanders remarks similarly in *Jesus and Judaism*, noting how Morton Smith (*Jesus the Magician* [New York: Harper and Row, 1977], 17) and A. E. Harvey (*Jesus and the Constraints of History* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982], 5–6) largely agree on the bedrock facts of Jesus's life, but come to quite different views about Jesus.

282 Michael R. Licona, "Is the Sky Falling in the World of Historical Jesus Research?," *BBR* 26.3 (2016): 353–68.

283 Licona, "Sky Falling" 365.

284 Arguably the most thorough recent treatment of the philosophy of history and historiography and its relation to NT historiography comes from Licona, *Resurrection* (see especially 29–132). He methodically sifts through matters of theory (including horizons, the uncertainty of historical knowledge, the challenges of and responses to postmodern historiography, issues related to the burden of proof) and method (with special consideration for different types of argumentation [arguments to the best explanation and arguments from statistical inference]) in order to lay bare his own horizons and his historiographic method. Although Licona uses the criteria (e.g., embarrassment on 293, dissimilarity on

Most of the authors above, however, have dialogued almost exclusively with other NT scholars regarding the criteria's validity or lack thereof, ignoring broader perspectives on general historiography. I argue this is a sin of omission: if Jesus researchers are serious about doing historical work, it is reasonable to cross-examine the methods of a wide array of historians—those whose expertise lies beyond biblical studies—for the benefits inherent in interdisciplinary dialogue are obvious. Indeed, interdisciplinary inquiry has made evident the benefits of memory studies and their application to life of Jesus research, enabling scholars to gain a clearer understanding of tradition transmission and memory malleability. Until now, however, Jesus researchers have largely assumed their methods and general historians' methods were the same, or substantively similar, but no single scholar or study reviewed above has demonstrated whether or not the criteria—or even general principles such as multiply attested traditions, historical coherence, dissimilarity or material that runs counter to one's expectations—actually and meaningfully feature in the methods of general historians.

To correct these omissions, in the following chapters I demonstrate the clear use of authenticating tools—criteria—at the levels of a) theory among general historians (chapter 2) and b) practice among modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity (chapter 4). If these historians employ criteria like those from NT studies, we cannot legitimately claim the criteria are dead. The implication, then, becomes clear: if the criteria are in reality useless, as some claim, perhaps not just life of Jesus research but the entire enterprise of historiography is called into question. It is to the philosophy of historiography and general historiographic method we now turn.

294, multiple independent reports on 442), he does not focus on the criteria or treat them systematically like the several studies reviewed above; for this reason, his discussion was not reviewed above. His work will, however, be useful below.

Authenticating Criteria in General Historical Method

The criteria of authenticity comprise only one particular aspect of historical Jesus methodology; one could pursue, e.g., grammatical-exegetical or archaeological work as well and still be engaged in Jesus research.¹ Most if not all Jesus researchers aim to present as plausible a (re)construction of Jesus as possible. I qualify “(re)construction” to acknowledge the predicament facing all historians regardless of specialization: because no historian can capture the real historical personage or event *in toto*, there is an inherent degree of creative manufacturing—or fictionalizing, properly understood—in every work of historiography;² undeniably historiography and biography necessitates reconfiguring and shaping data into a coherent narrative.³ In the mid-1990s, Luke Timothy Johnson aptly described the challenges of understanding and

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- 1 For grammatical-exegetical Jesus research see Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*, JSNTSup 191 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): chapter 4, “The Criterion of Greek Language and Its Context” (126–80); chapter 5, “The Criterion of Greek Textual Variance” (181–209); and chapter 6, “The Criterion of Discourse Features” (210–37). For two recent examples of archaeologically-based Jesus research see Seán Freyne, “Reimagining Jesus in His Culture: Reflections on Some Recent Scholarly Byways,” in *Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions*, 138–48; and Jeremy M. Hutton, “Topography, Biblical Traditions, and Reflections on John’s Baptism of Jesus,” in *ibid.*, 149–77. See also James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) for an older but standard discussion of archaeology and Jesus research.
 - 2 So John P. Meier, “As I have stressed throughout this series, the ‘historical Jesus’ is not coterminous with the ‘real Jesus.’ The latter Jesus would, at least in principle, involve everything Jesus of Nazareth said, did, and experienced in the thirty-plus years of his life in the first half of the 1st century A.D. A good deal of that total reality of who Jesus was is lost to us and will never be recovered. In contrast, the historical Jesus is an abstract construct created by modern scholars by applying historical-critical methods to ancient sources. If scholars apply these methods to the appropriate sources with professional expertise, careful logic, and personal integrity, we have good reason to expect that their abstract construct will approach and partially coincide with the 1st-century Jew called Jesus of Nazareth” (*Marginal Jew*, v:10).
 - 3 On narrativization in historiography, see the delightful discussion in Bernard Bailyn, *On the Teaching and Writing of History. Responses to 2 Series of Questions*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 74–77. The historian’s selection and connection of data points rebuffs any attempt at an absolutely true presentation; but the historian can nonetheless offer a trustworthy presentation (see below).

writing “history,” and despite the methodological shifts in Jesus research since the turn of the millennium his cautions remain relevant today. Much of the past is beyond recovery, and what is recoverable is made sensible only when historians “draw lines of demarcation that enable us to focus, describe, define, and interpret. Yet, if we are honest, we also recognize that even in this simple editorial act, we are already engaging in interpretation.”⁴ Events in history are irreducibly complex, and historians should humbly acknowledge that their conclusions come packaged in degrees of probability.⁵

Along similar lines, John Meier began his multi-volume project on Jesus with this point, “The historical Jesus is not the real Jesus. The real Jesus is not the historical Jesus.”⁶ He continues,

Having abandoned the naïve hope of knowing the “real” Jesus by means of historical criticism, what do we mean when we say that we are pursuing the “historical Jesus” or the “Jesus of history”? ... Of its very nature, this quest can *reconstruct* only fragments of a mosaic, the faint outline of a faded fresco that allows of many interpretations. ... [W]e are involved in the *hypothetical reconstruction* of a past figure by purely scientific means: empirical data from ancient documents, sifted by human minds operating by inference, analogy, and certain specific criteria.⁷

Meier, like Johnson, acknowledges that even with a clearly defined method historians of Jesus can only present impressions of the man from Nazareth. Additionally, those who have eschewed criteria-based approaches in favor of memory studies acknowledge the hypothetical nature in writing on the historical Jesus. Dale Allison notes that one of the canons of memory studies is the fictionalization intrinsic to narratives, even “historical” ones: “When, as in the canonical Gospels, memory becomes story, narrative conventions inescapably sculpt the result. Storytellers, needing to bring order out of life’s chaos, are wont to impose upon their materials a neat beginning, a coherent middle, and a resolution that satisfies.”⁸ Despite the creative reimagining or fictionalization

4 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 82.

5 Johnson, *Misguided Quest*, 84–85.

6 John P. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:21. Meier continues, “What do we mean when we say we want to investigate the ‘real’ Jesus ...? ... Obviously we cannot mean the *total* reality of that person, everything he or she ever thought, felt, experienced, did, and said” (1:21).

7 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:25, 30–31 (my emphasis).

8 Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 7. He argues further, “We *construct* memories of people and events in

inherent to modern or ancient historiography,⁹ the goal of *historical* Jesus research is to use the best methods on the best sources in order to present a plausible reconstruction of Jesus's work and teaching which fits reasonably

the same way we reproduce maps from our heads: we omit most of the details, straighten the lines, and round off the angles, thereby creating a sort of minimalist cartoon" (11, my emphasis).

- 9 Some see greater degrees of fictionalization in historiography and biography than others. Allison may overstate his case, however (see above). Although he does not call invention of speeches a convention, John Marincola does recognize the occasional invention of a speech when no exemplar exists ("Speeches in Classical Historiography," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola, 2 vols., *Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007], 118–32, especially 127–30). Classicist Charles Fornara recognizes elements of "expansion, truncation, or reduction" in, e.g., the speeches of ancient Greco-Roman historiography, but at the levels of theory and practice, "speeches were deeds or actions requiring accurate reproduction in substance" (Charles W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* [Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1988], 145). Following Fornara, W. J. McCoy argues that Greco-Roman historians had no convention of freely inventing speeches; although some did, this was by no means typical (W. J. McCoy, "In the Shadow of Thucydides," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 3–32, at 28.) Regarding accuracy in narratives and speeches alike, see also Lucian of Samosata, *How to Write History*, 41. C. K. Barrett observes several "interesting parallels" with Lucian's statements and Luke 1:1–4 ("How History Should Be Written," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, 33–57, at 35).

On fictionalization in ancient biography, see Koen De Temmerman and Kristoffel Demoen, eds., *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), xi, cited in Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 60n.239. Regarding the Gospels, Ulrich Luz argues that Matthew's thoroughly fictionalized account frustrates attempts to learn much about the historical Jesus ("Matthew's Interpretive 'Tendencies' and the Historical Jesus," in *Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions*, 577–99). Jens Schröter believes the Gospels' theological agendas disqualify them from being reliable historical accounts and thus, by implication, they are quite fictional. He states, "The title of the recently published book by Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), is therefore questionable" ("The Criteria of Authenticity in Jesus Research and Historiographical Method," in *JCDA*, 49–70, at 53n.19). Surprisingly, Schröter bases his assessment on Gospels research from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century (53) and he appears to be unconcerned or unconvinced by, e.g., the discussion in David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 17–45, or Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). On the other hand, writing after Luz and Schröter, see Keener, *Christobiography*, 60–66, and Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?: What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–6. Licona cautions that "identifying instances of invention [i.e. fictionalization] often involves greater amount of conjecture, since we cannot be certain Plutarch did not have a written or oral source for the details he provides" (24).

within his social, cultural, and religious milieu.¹⁰ Many scholars still believe the criteria of authenticity serve as one means for doing so.

In chapter 1, I sought to bring clarity to the din of voices defending or rejecting the criteria in Jesus research. From the literature reviewed above, three broad groups emerged: 1) those scholars who are critical but generally accepting of the criteria; 2) those who wish to revise existing or offer new criteria; and 3) those who marginalize or reject the criteria altogether.¹¹ This last group has come to form something of a new consensus—or at least a new, major stream—within Jesus research, gaining steam predominantly in the last two decades.¹² In the review above I also drew attention to those scholars who asserted that their criteria-based approaches aligned their method with that of general historians.¹³ Despite an occasional reference to general historians, not a single scholar claiming continuity with general historiographic method substantially demonstrated the similarity of their criteria-based approach with the methods of general historians, instead they merely asserted that these methods aligned. But if Meier and others are right, that the work of historians of Jesus is essentially *historical* work, aiming to present a plausible (re)construction of Jesus based on the best sources available, then it is reasonable to expect Jesus researchers to be cognizant of and utilize methods familiar to general historians.¹⁴ Despite these quintessentially similar aims, the paltry or

10 One point of contention for Jesus research is what exactly are the best available sources. Compare John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), xxvii–xxxiv, with James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 139–72, and with Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 47–84.

11 Some overlap among the groups becomes apparent as scholars changed their opinions over time or engaged in different projects. Evans details several criteria in one article (Craig A. Evans, “Authenticity Criteria in the Life of Jesus Research,” *CSR* 19 [1989]: 6–31), but a few years later he discusses and rejects two of the more “dubious” criteria in another work (Craig A. Evans, “Recent Developments in Jesus Research: Presuppositions, Criteria, and Sources,” in *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, AGJU 25 [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 1–49, at 24–25, where he dismisses Bultmann’s criterion of least distinctive features as useless and rejects the criterion of proleptic eschatology as question-begging).

12 It should be noted that, while in Hooker’s oft-cited articles she sharply criticizes the criteria, she nevertheless capitulates to their use for, in her words, “there are no other [tools], and there are unlikely to be any better ones discovered” (Morna D. Hooker, “On Using the Wrong Tool,” *Theology* 75 [1972]: 570–81, at 580–81).

13 Meier is the most noteworthy among them. See, e.g., his *Marginal Jew*, v:9. See also Tom Holmén, “Doubts About Double Dissimilarity: Restructuring the Main Criterion of Jesus-of-History Research,” in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, NTTS 28.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 47–80, at 79 and 79n.122.

14 C. Behan McCullagh states the matter more succinctly, historians produce “historical descriptions,” i.e. statements *intended* to describe the past, whether they actually do so

non-existent engagement with general historiographic method suggests that many, if not most, historical Jesus scholars are either largely ignorant of general historiographic methodology, or they do not believe these methods are relevant.

A fresh look at and comparison with the methods of general historians—the very project to which some Jesus researchers who focus on the criteria of authenticity have hinted but not meaningfully pursued—could advance the conversation regarding methodology in Jesus research. The critical comparison of one discipline's method with the method of another related discipline has been a concern of general historians for generations from the scientific revolution beginning in the 16th century to the linguistic turn and the post-modern critique of historiography in the 20th and 21st centuries. In his accessible text on how historians present the past, John Lewis Gaddis urges historians to engage in the important task of comparing their methods with the methods of other disciplines, especially the sciences: “Most of what I’ve said so far has been based on the premise that the doing of history is ‘like’ certain other things ...” he says as he compares the discipline of history to “other things” like painting and cartography, as well as mathematics, astronomy, geology, paleontology, and evolutionary biology.¹⁵ Observation, selectivity, and inference are but a few of the activities necessary for engaging in each of these disciplines; by observing, selecting, and inferring, the historian operates “like,” e.g., a landscape painter or paleontologist. Because the historian cannot capture the total view before him or her, nor can she or he witness their subject firsthand, they must use tools of reasoning to aid in constructing a plausible impression of the subject at hand (not unlike what Meier describes above). “I do think,” Gaddis continues, “that by comparing what [historians] do to what happens in other fields, historians might accomplish several things,”¹⁶ namely: (further) justify historiography’s existence as a discipline (an especially important task in light of postmodern critiques of historiography¹⁷); clarify historiography’s relationship with other disciplines; and build disciplinary self-confidence (which is closely related to the first goal). The second result is especially intriguing for our purposes since the relationship of historiographic method, in terms of

or not (*Justifying Historical Descriptions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 1–14), at 1.

15 John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50. The argument continues on 51–52.

16 Gaddis, 50–52.

17 See the brief discussion of postmodernism and historians’ varied responses in Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: Norton, 1999), 1–12.

development and praxis, among Jesus researchers and general historians is my primary focus for this study.

Along these lines Gaddis argues history as a discipline is more like the historical sciences (e.g., evolutionary biology) than the social sciences; as in evolutionary biology, historians must take into account evolutionary processes no longer visible which nevertheless produced certain effects, or what he calls “structures,” still visible today.¹⁸ As renowned historians from the 20th century Martin Bloch and E. H. Carr before him,¹⁹ Gaddis raises the question, Is history a science? To answer the question, he recommends reframing the matter altogether: instead of categorizing history as “science” or “art”—which, when conceptualized in these terms it is truly a mixture of both—historians should instead learn from and draw analogies with those sciences that are intrinsically historical. “The distinction,” he explains, “would lie along the line separating *actual replicability* as the standard for verification—the rerunning of experiments in a laboratory—from the *virtual replicability* that’s associated with thought experiments. And it would be the accessibility versus the inaccessibility of processes that would make the difference.”²⁰ Disciplines like evolutionary biology and paleontology deal with processes that span centuries or millennia; it is therefore impossible for researchers to attempt to observe firsthand the evolution of species—let alone live dinosaurs. Since the direct observation of and experimentation on these historical phenomena are impossible, “[t]hese disciplines instead depend upon thought experiments: practitioners rerun in their minds—or perhaps now in their computer simulations—what their test tubes, centrifuges, and electron microscopes can’t manage. They then look for evidence suggesting which of these mental exercises comes closest to explaining their physical observations. Reproducibility,” a hallmark of the scientific method, thus “means building a consensus that such correspondences seem plausible.”²¹ Consequently, Gaddis urges historians to devise arguments

18 Gaddis, 35–36, describes a “structure” as that which remains from historical processes, artifacts, documents, and the like. These structures are strikingly similar to Le Donne’s “refractions” (*Historiographical Jesus*).

19 Here Gaddis refers to the works of Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1953); and Edward Hallett Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

20 Gaddis, 43 (original emphasis). For a similar discussion on replicability, see N. T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 96.

21 Gaddis, 40. Cf. Michael J. Salevouris and Conal Furay, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), who affirm that due to the limitations inherent in any source, historians must make inferences from evidence and reason in order to “fill in the gaps” left by the sources (177).

to the best explanation,²² and calls for historians to adopt a self-critical spirit as they cross-examine their methods with those disciplines which trade in virtual replicability.

Surely, the interdisciplinary comparison of method that Gaddis urges general historians to do is applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to historians of Jesus as well. The inaccessibility of Jesus's life events and all the minutiae of each word, glance, or action lost to oblivion that would otherwise help Jesus researchers better understand the Gospels demands that we seek virtual replicability by running thought experiments of the kind Gaddis describes as they endeavor to determine "which of these mental exercises comes closest to explaining their physical observations" in the Gospels. There will thus be great gains in historical Jesus methodology by doing real comparative work with the methods of general historians.

1 The Methods of General Historians

To answer this call for comparison requires a few preliminary steps. In order to place the discussion of methodology in its proper context, it will first be necessary to survey the development of modern historiography, describing its roots in the Renaissance and Reformation which led to further developments in twentieth- and twenty-first-century historiographic method. Given the breadth of sources available for such an investigation, the major epochs are summarized briefly to demonstrate only the most pertinent trends in historiography and those major practitioners who epitomized these trends.²³ Second,

22 Cf. McCullagh, 15–44; and more briefly in Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 108–14.

23 In order to avoid recreating what has been done elsewhere with greater breadth and depth, the following works are recommended. For a wide-ranging discussion of historical and international scope, see Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). For a less comprehensive though perhaps more accessible introduction to historiography, see Mark T. Gilderhus, *History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003). The following introductions treat modern historiography, focusing generally on developments in historiography from the Enlightenment to the 20th century: Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography* (London: Routledge, 1999); Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, and Supriya Mukherjee, eds., *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2008); Roger Spalding and Christopher Parker, *Historiography: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Finally, this brief but helpful volume examines the variations of historiography exclusively in the 20th century: Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the*

I will analyze and synthesize what a representative sampling of modern historians have said about general historiographic methods. Third, I will then highlight the particular features of general historiographic methodology which are most relevant and similar to the criteria in the methodology of Jesus research.

1.1 *The Development of Modern Historiography*

At the risk of some oversimplification, the European continent largely experienced religious unity during the middle ages (c.500–1500 CE).²⁴ It was not long into the sixteenth century, however, when Martin Luther became the catalyst for what would prove to be Europe's religious disintegration.²⁵ Luther's aims are well-documented and need not detain us for long except to note the snowball effect of his ninety-five theses: as the Reformation continued it developed from one monk's concerns with certain aspects of late medieval Church praxis into a conglomeration of religious, cultural, and even political influences. Additional forces of change were afoot as well, due especially to the influx of Byzantine refugees fleeing the Ottoman hordes pouring into western Byzantium and the eastern reaches of Europe. Ancient manuscripts and a renewed awareness of classical philosophy and literature thus made their way to Europe initiating a resurgence in the languages and learning of classical antiquity. Fascination with these texts and the cultures which produced them grew and became the focal point for scholars and statesmen alike. Although some at this time began to notice how ancient, pagan Europe contrasted with medieval, Christian Europe, many humanists of the latter era smoothed over the differences by presenting "a gradual unfolding of the 'pious philosophy' up to Christ. The ancient thinkers had been as wise as one could be without the true faith."²⁶

This perceived continuity with the ancient world and their own induced certain historians to begin imitating ancient models of historiography. The late and well-respected Italian historian Arnaldo Momigliano describes

Postmodern Challenge, with a New Epilogue by the Author (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005).

24 Another perspective can be found in Ludo Milis, ed., *The Pagan Middle Ages*, trans. Tanis Guest (Woodbridge, England: Boydell Press, 1998), who argues medieval Europe was more pagan than typically believed. But see the review by Charles S. Watkins, "The Pagan Middle Ages," *JEH* 51.2 (2000): 389, who doubts the value of several of these essays.

25 For standard and recent surveys of Luther's life and work, see the following: Roland Herbert Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon, 1950); Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Random House, 2017).

26 Breisach, 154.

Claude de Peiresc (born 1580) who serves as one example of the antiquarian type of historian, which became a popular hobby or craft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: he was as an avid collector and commenter on antiquities, whether texts, statues, or coins.²⁷ Several of de Peiresc's contemporaries (one of whom was his biographer, Pierre Gassendi) were drawn to the second-century CE physician and philosopher Sextus Empiricus, whom Henricus Stephanus (a.k.a. Henri Estienne) had translated, as well as the classical historian Herodotus.²⁸ Frequently preferring their own empirical observations of certain *realia*, these antiquarians began to distrust the *prima facie* value of literary traditions. By way of comparison, Galileo operated in much the same vein, preferring and promulgating his own observations of the cosmos over and against the authority of his predecessors (or the Church). Historian Ernst Breisach describes the further blending of antiquarian ideas with historiography in the work of Italian historian Flavio Biondo, who was one of the Renaissance-era pioneers of using nonliterary sources to present descriptions of the past.²⁹ Literary sources did not fall completely out of favor, however, and in light of the aforementioned influx of ancient texts, Renaissance-era humanists began to develop more carefully their philological and text-critical skills.³⁰ Humanists "understood that all people in a given period form sentences in a characteristic manner, have a certain vocabulary, and use words in identifiable ways. ... [They] had discovered the concepts of cultural context and anachronism, although they had a limited understanding of them."³¹ This sensitivity toward historical difference and distance would prove to be a key component in later historiographic method.

As the cultural and intellectual changes that characterized the Renaissance and Reformation developed further into what is now called the Enlightenment,

27 Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 54–58.

28 Momigliano remarks "[Stephanus] liked Herodotus as a true collector of facts from direct observation, and in his colorful language he described Sextus Empiricus as a thinker who would help to drive to madness the dogmatic impious philosophers of modern times" (57).

29 Breisach, 161. Cf. McCullagh's remarks on historical descriptions (*Justifying*, 1).

30 Resources on biblical textual criticism recognize the Renaissance- and Reformation-era roots of their methods and praxis as well. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 19–20; Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3–11; Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137–64.

31 Breisach, 161.

the intelligentsia of the late Renaissance and Reformation cast an increasingly suspicious eye on religiously rooted grand narratives. Earlier, in the wide-ranging monastic movements of the Middle Ages and the theology of the Catholic Church, appreciating mystery in the universe was a sign of deference to the belief of God's action in the world. Enlightenment-era thinkers, on the other hand, tended to reject mystery as a viable or even a desirable category. Scientific reasoning brought forth a new paradigm through which to view the world. As scientific thinking increasingly drifted from its traditional Greek philosophical moorings, the natural sciences familiar to modern students developed for the first time into distinct yet related fields. The understanding of the world as directed by God's will gave way to the observation of discrete principles that manifest in ordered laws of action and reaction. Modern historian E. Sreedharan sharply remarks, "The rejection of all divine plans in the story of the development of man meant a replacement of the Genesis story of the creation and fall (of man) by a plausible account of the origin of mankind. This intellectual need of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment called for history ... if only to show the barbarism of the former ages and the superiority of their own."³² To this end, one particular expression of this growing scientific impetus manifested in the application of scientific principles to various areas of knowledge including the practice of historiography.³³

Philosopher of history Aviezer Tucker demonstrates how scientific principles came to influence critical historiography through the theoretical and methodological developments in three particular scientific-historical disciplines. An important Enlightenment-era intellectual development was the shift from what Tucker terms "traditionalist cognitive values" to "critical

32 E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 B.C. to A.D. 2000* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004), 109.

33 Despite Enlightenment-era overtures to objectivity and scientific processes, Wright exposes the tensions apparent among many Enlightenment-era historians: although these historians applied scientific principles such as skepticism, analogy, and correlation, the increasing belief in national and human progress led to the (unwitting) adoption of an Idealist worldview. Wright finds this tension especially evident among NT historians in the late Enlightenment:

"Much of the early historical investigation of the New Testament was done in Germany between the late eighteenth century and the early twentieth century, just when the German Enlightenment ... was eager to challenge traditional Christianity. ... The aim was precisely not to find 'what actually happened' in some supposedly 'neutral' fashion but to 'discover' *what ought to have happened* if the ideals of the Enlightenment, and with them the great new European culture-project as a whole, were to be valid. Hence *the pressure to epistemological caution, if not downright scepticism, was powerfully reinforced by the social, cultural, and theological pressure towards forms of radical Protestantism*" (Wright, *History and Eschatology*, 88 [original emphasis]; cf. 87–89).

cognitive values,” two opposing cognitive approaches. Within a traditionalist system, the tradition is respected as an (or the) authoritative voice, based on the assumption the tradition has been accurately preserved and transmitted.³⁴ On the other hand, “whereas traditional cognitive values counsel trust in a tradition, critical cognitive values demand the examination of evidence for the causal chain that allegedly connected past events with present evidence.”³⁵ Tucker describes how developments within the Reformation proved to be the first major strike against traditionalist cognitive values. Once the intellectual and spiritual hegemony of the Catholic Church began to crack under the pressure of Luther’s and others’ movements, upholding such traditions became increasingly untenable for many. The second major blow against traditionalist values, according to Tucker, came in the form of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Ancient authorities long held in high esteem were now questioned and their conclusions were either corrected or outright rejected: “If Aristotle was mistaken and corrected by Galileo and Newton, Herodotus and Tacitus may not be in a more privileged position.”³⁶ But, were the pendulum to swing too far, one would be forced to doubt the possibility of reliable knowledge of the past, especially the distant past. Yet this is precisely what happened when skepticism of knowing the past ran rampant among certain Enlightenment-era thinkers.

Tucker contends that scientific historiography truly began to develop when thinkers such as Descartes, Bayle, and Hume challenged long and widely held beliefs related to numerous fields of knowledge, whether in philosophy, metaphysics, or history. Historiography came into its own only after historians took cues from developments in biblical criticism, classical philology, and comparative linguistics, that is, when practitioners within these disciplines began to incorporate a more scientific basis for their operations. Since one aim of this study is to highlight a particular aspect of historical method related to biblical criticism, Tucker’s discussion of the beginnings of scientific biblical criticism provides a valuable case in point for our purposes.³⁷ During the mid-eighteenth

34 Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), states, “Traditionalist historiography judges historiographic propositions according to their connection with traditional authority. ... Traditionalist historiography follows oral or written interpretations of these authorities by designated authoritative interpreters,” 47.

35 Tucker, 48, citing philosopher and historian R. G. Collingwood approvingly, who remarked scientific historiography started when historians began to “put their authorities in the witness-box” (*The Idea of History: With Lectures 1926–1928*, ed. W. J. van der Dussen, rev. ed., [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], 237). Cf. Gaddis’s “structures” above.

36 Tucker, 51.

37 For the discussion on classical philology and comparative linguistics see Tucker, 59–68.

century Jean Astruc argued that Genesis was a composite document: he proposed the hypothesis that Moses had used sources to compile the book of Genesis, on the basis of the “four different proper names used to refer to God in [Genesis].”³⁸ Tucker notes how Astruc rooted his theory in a particular theory of language development which posited that certain facets of languages—in this case, divine names—tended to change more slowly than others. Despite this innovative and extraordinary step in understanding the origin of the Pentateuch, Tucker claims Astruc cannot be credited with “found[ing] a paradigm [for biblical criticism] because he did not found a community of scholars who shared his theories and methods.”³⁹ Only when later scholars began to follow the methods of Henry Reimarus and Johann Semler can one speak of a true community of critical biblical scholarship, and hence an academic paradigm. The conditions for such a development were generally more favorable in the German Protestant principalities, according to Tucker.⁴⁰

Tucker’s mention of the founding of a community of scholars might seem out of place here but this is a central point and theme of his monograph *Our Knowledge of the Past*. In the opening chapter Tucker presents the basics of his epistemology as a historian, which is composed of hypotheses for what constitutes knowledge.⁴¹ To summarize his arguments, Tucker espouses a theory of knowledge based on certain epistemically significant, shared cognitive values (similar to but not completely identical with) the critical cognitive values which developed during the Enlightenment (see above). Shared cognitive values differ from, e.g., therapeutic values which “judge historiographic propositions according to their effect on the psychological well-being of their intended audience.”⁴² On the other hand, “When an uncoerced, sufficiently large, and uniquely heterogeneous group agrees on a set of cognitive values,

38 Much of this summary of the development of biblical criticism is taken from Tucker, 53–59. Unlike a standard introduction on the historical development of OT critical method (e.g., Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Pascale Dominique [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 96–126, who discusses many of the same individuals and their work as does Tucker; or see John W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], whom Tucker cites a few times), Tucker intends primarily to highlight those values which developed within and later became key to the development of critical, scientific historiography (on which, see Tucker, 68–85).

39 Tucker, 54.

40 Tucker, 54–55.

41 See also the discussion of epistemic justification in Peter Kosso, “Philosophy of Historiography,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 9–25.

42 Tucker, 40.

hypotheses that attempt to explain the consensus by factors that only a part of the group share are at a disadvantage in comparison with the conduciveness hypothesis,"⁴³ i.e., that which is more conducive to knowledge than, say, sociological or other theoretical models. Accordingly, true knowledge on a subject is ascertainable only when an uncoerced, uniquely heterogeneous, and sufficiently large body shares cognitive values like accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness.⁴⁴

To return to Tucker's discussion of the development of biblical criticism, Tucker notes that while Astruc's method was innovative, it was Reimarus, Semler, and de Wette who truly fathered modern biblical criticism because through them a sufficiently large, heterogeneous body of scholars accepted their work. Following them, Eichorn's further work on the Pentateuch yields an instructive example: Eichorn operated with a theory of linguistic development that posited language's constant change over time. Eichorn argued if the Pentateuch's Hebrew is basically similar to ostensibly later books like Samuel and Kings, then the Pentateuch cannot be a creation of the Mosaic era but of a later time. Critical cognitive values further developed in biblical criticism as well as within classical philology and comparative linguistics,⁴⁵ which paved the way for scientific historiography to come into its own.⁴⁶

If the Renaissance began a shift toward European secularization (noting Breisach's caution above), many Enlightenment-era thinkers increasingly disregarded or rejected the once dominant Christian paradigm. Voltaire was one of the first to compose a world historiography that totally dispensed with the Christian framework of previous Renaissance-era historians, as well as with the traditional themes of political and military histories. Voltaire's work is a case in point of the Enlightenment presupposition that Western (i.e., European) society had progressed further than other areas due to European rationality and Eastern irrationality (e.g., spiritualism and mysticism). British figures like the philosopher and historian David Hume and historian Edward Gibbon also produced histories in the same vein as Voltaire.⁴⁷ While they

43 Tucker, 37. *Pace* Miriam Solomon, *Social Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), who emphasizes the role of diversity of biases in ascertaining knowledge, rather than shared cognitive values (cited by Tucker, 31–32).

44 Tucker, 36, citing Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 184–86.

45 For classical philology see Tucker, 59–63; and for comparative linguistics see 63–68.

46 See Tucker, 56–58.

47 David Hume, *The History of England, From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 6 vols. (New York: R. Worthington, 1880); Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Henry Hart Milman and M. Guizot (Philadelphia: The Nottingham Society, 1880).

treated political and military history, like Voltaire they also commented on culture and other matters.⁴⁸

Ultimately, intellectual currents during the Enlightenment instilled within many historians the belief that culture at large was progressing from the intellectual darkness of the past. As such, progress became the highest—if not a quasi-religious—ideal of many leading thinkers of this time.⁴⁹ Typifying this ideal is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *On the Education of the Human Race* (1777) and Marquis de Condorcet's *A Sketch of a Tableau of the Progress of the Human Spirit* (1794).⁵⁰ Condorcet divided world history into epochs of development, the tenth and final epoch being a utopian society where humankind, on the basis of superior education and rationality, lived moral lives free from subjugation, oppression, and war. Historiography thus became a tool for the promotion of progress with the purpose of educating society and enabling it to become rational and humane.

Despite the value of Enlightenment perspectives, the era's excessive optimism merits certain critiques. It is ironic that Condorcet published *A Sketch* while frequently fleeing fellow revolutionaries who wanted his head because he did not vote for the execution of Louis XVI. But the grotesque barbarism of the French Revolution only temporarily stalled the belief of some in the inevitable flow toward progress (even though the Napoleonic Wars and the American Civil War should have given further pause). The unyielding belief in inevitable progress was mostly dead after World War I, though some still held out hope (see below).

The hubris characteristic of many of the era's leading thinkers led to the abandonment of certain worthwhile principles that were present in the ancient conception of the world; colloquially, in the Enlightenment the intellectual baby was thrown out with the bath water. Breisach implies as much when he remarks:

Historians who truly stripped themselves of all traditional views (seen as prejudices) had to reconstruct the world from scratch on the basis of sources and a philosophical explanation of the world as a substitute for tradition. But the resulting multitude of views would threaten the truth

48 See John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 48, for Gibbon.

49 Though Breisach, 207–09, rightly cautions against overstating this. He provides several examples of *philosophes* who were not entirely convinced that the world, led by European Enlightenment rationalism, was steadily progressing.

50 Sreedharan, 110.

value of history and that in turn prompted an agonizing struggle to ward off the specter of relativism.⁵¹

The nineteenth century saw a number of significant schools of historiography develop. Leopold von Ranke is often credited with enlarging the purview of political historiography and with founding a paradigm of historiographic theory and practice (see Tucker's comments above regarding founding intellectual paradigms). His main interests were in the development of the "unending struggle for power" between the European states.⁵² Foreign policy and diplomatic history became a staple of his trade, and the method he taught and employed in his seminars at the University of Göttingen accentuated research on an impressive array of primary source documents. Ranke is perhaps most famous for his dictum to write history *wie es eigentlich gewesen* or "how it actually was."⁵³ Not limiting himself to historical political documents, he also took into account firsthand records, memoirs, and diaries, as well as government documents and other official correspondences.⁵⁴ The focus of Ranke and later followers was the nation state, but the horrors of WWI eventually shifted this focus to other areas.

French historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre began the *Annales* school of historiography in 1929. Their methods and interests epitomized the search for new foci by further broadening the scope of history beyond *res politica* and incorporating the insights of the social sciences such as economics, sociology, social psychology, and geography.⁵⁵ Along similar lines, historians within the Marxist tradition centered on economics and its relation to class interaction. These efforts in the early twentieth century significantly impacted the development of historiography throughout the following decades despite the strength of Ranke's emphasis on nation-states.

It was not until after WWII, however, that most historians finally abandoned Condorcet's theory of increasing progression; instead, many feared the seemingly inevitable vision of post-modernity, that the irony of the state

51 Breisach, 269.

52 Tosh, 49.

53 Breisach, 233.

54 Samuel Byrskog (*Story as History—History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 19–23) argues that "a significant factor in [the] decline of oral history" as a viable branch of historical investigation was due to "the professionalization of history during the nineteenth century," largely owing to Ranke's influence. Johann Gustav Droysen's and Ernst Bernheim's work in historiography led to the further professionalization of historiography and the continued disregard for oral history.

55 Tosh, 53.

of perfection was simply a static condition held at the price of freedom.⁵⁶ Mid-twentieth-century deconstructionists led by Derrida,⁵⁷ Foucault, and Lyotard undermined the notion of progress by labeling it and all other absolutes as illusions which, “when wedded to sufficient power, have caused immense human catastrophes.”⁵⁸ Within historiography then, postmodernists increasingly rejected meta-narratives—unexpectedly, since many postmodernists have accepted the Marxist meta-narrative—considering them dangerous and destructive. Much of what constitutes postmodern historiography today is thus described as “history from below,” i.e., a focus on those groups which did not feature or were not fairly portrayed in the traditional histories of the nineteenth century and how those historically in power marginalized these groups. Postmodern thinkers viewed themselves as liberating “human beings from the ethical meaninglessness that in their opinion the rational—or in their view rationalistic—approach to life and reality [typified by the Enlightenment and modernity] implied.”⁵⁹ Carried to excess, however, some postmodernist historians began to doubt the viability of historiography as a discipline, arguing instead that historiography was simply another exercise in coercion and power dynamics. As powerful as postmodernist critiques of historiography have been, it does not appear they have won the day.⁶⁰

Regarding twentieth-century developments in historiographical method, historians grew in their appreciation of the scientific roots of their methods but distrusted the ability of science to provide the answers and security which Enlightenment historians sought. Iggers astutely observes,

[W]hile historians became much more guarded in their belief in the authority of science, they nevertheless worked with the conviction that the historian dealt with a real and not an imagined past and that this real past, although accessible only through the medium of the historian's mind, nevertheless called for methods and approaches that followed a logic of inquiry.⁶¹

56 Breisach, 421.

57 For a brief introduction with helpful bibliography see Robert Bernasconi, “Derrida, Jacques,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald M. Borchert, 2nd ed., 10 vols. (Detroit: Thomson Gale/Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 2:715–19. On deconstruction see Alan D. Schrift, “Deconstruction,” in *ibid.*, 2:661–62.

58 Breisach, 422.

59 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 13.

60 This discussion, fascinating as it is, ultimately lies beyond the interest and scope of this study. See the discussion in Licona, 79–89.

61 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 15.

This logic of inquiry, perhaps surprisingly, developed certain tools that bear a striking resemblance to the criteria of authenticity in Jesus research.

In the survey above I have described the most significant socio-cultural and intellectual developments which most directly affected the development of the discipline of history. The current state of the discipline coheres with Iggers's statement above: the (few) valid critiques postmodernist historians can level at their more realist counterparts notwithstanding,⁶² by and large most historians today operate as if something can indeed be known about the past and that historians can fairly accurately—though never perfectly—offer presentations of the past.⁶³ The methods and approaches comprising the logic of inquiry to which Iggers referred are the very steps and procedures of writing historiography and it is to these we now turn.

2 Modern Historians on Their Methods

One of the most well-known and systematic presentations of modern historiographic method comes from two late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French historians, Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos. Langlois and Seignobos set forth their robust scientific method for writing history and drew many parallels from the physical sciences, arguing "In the century to come [the historian] will have to ally himself with the students of physical science, with whose methods his own have so much in common."⁶⁴ Later historians cite the influence of Langlois and Seignobos,⁶⁵ and for this reason much of the discussion below will begin with their work.⁶⁶

62 See the engaging treatment in Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 69–107.

63 Cf. Trueman, 25–68.

64 Charles Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. George Godfrey Berry (London: Duckworth, 1912). The first French edition was *Introduction aux études historiques* (1897). The majority of the discussion above comes from section II, chapters 6–8 (141–208).

65 Scholars who cite Langlois and Seignobos include: Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 166n.17; Bloch, 3–4n.1; Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 70–71.

66 The analysis below draws heavily from monograph-length treatments of historiographic method; studies of this length typically grant the author sufficient space to present the rationales for their methods. The historians whose works on method are reviewed below have a range of areas of expertise: Langlois, Seignobos, and Bloch specialize in French history; Gottschalk in American history and Revolutionary France; Garraghan in Jesuit history; Howell and Prevenier in Belgian history; and Tosh in British history. Despite the

In the opening chapters of their introduction Langlois and Seignobos discuss the aims and methods of historical criticism. Like their counterparts in biblical studies, who also study historical documents to understand the past, Langlois and Seignobos discuss the importance of the “auxiliary sciences.”⁶⁷ These auxiliary sciences include technical and specialized disciplines like paleography, epigraphy, philology, archaeology, and diplomatics (formerly the formal study of charters, but now historians often apply this term more broadly to various types of official documents from the past as well as the present day).⁶⁸ The auxiliary sciences are necessary for the work of historical criticism which is subdivided into external and internal criticisms. External criticism of a document refers to the critical investigation of the document itself as an artifact of history. This necessary, preliminary work includes textual criticism, as well as determining authorship and provenance. Internal or interpretive criticism is the critical analysis of the statements in the document, i.e., “[t]he object of [this] criticism is to discover what in a document may be accepted as true.”⁶⁹ They further divide internal criticism into two groups of activities: 1) the analysis of the document’s contents to understand what the author meant, and 2) the analysis of how the document was produced and the need for verification of its statements. This type of critical investigation is all the more necessary when the author of the document is increasingly culturally, linguistically, and chronologically removed from the historian.

different areas of expertise, the methods they espouse have frequent, substantial similarities. At the end of chapter 3 (below) I review a few brief comments on method from modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity Michael Grant and Robin Lane Fox. Although their discussions of method are not robust like those reviewed in this chapter, the authentication criteria they espouse and apply coheres in essentials with what Langlois and Seignobos et al. present.

67 Langlois and Seignobos, 42–59.

68 French Benedictine monk Jean Mabillon pioneered the techniques for the formal study of official documents in 1681 in his *De Re Diplomatica* (Neapoli: V. Ursini, 1789). The Wikipedia article “Auxiliary Sciences of History” has a helpful list of the various disciplines in this category: see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auxiliary_sciences_of_history (accessed July 28, 2019). For auxiliary sciences relevant to NT studies see, e.g., Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography*, corrected ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) for Greek paleography; cf. Bradley H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C. – A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002) for epigraphy; cf. Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro, Jerome Lectures: 16th Series (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1988) for iconography; and cf. Richard E. Oster, “Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Inquiry,” *JBL* 101.2 (1982): 195–223, for numismatics.

69 Langlois and Seignobos, 141.

In order to avoid forming an opinion prior to completely reading a text, Langlois and Seignobos recommend this general rule: first and foremost, the historian should analyze a document's contents to determine the author's intended meaning. The process of analyzation requires the historian to "discern and isolate all the ideas expressed by the author."⁷⁰ Here they caution against assuming words have the same meanings over time and across regions; instead, the historian must take into account the author's style and must be sensitive to a word's context in order to determine its meaning. Langlois and Seignobos recognize this process would be inordinately time-consuming if fully executed, so to shorten the process they suggest the historian can operate with the following general assumptions: official documents, legal proceedings, charters, and similar materials do not normally use words obliquely, and therefore "the general form of the document permits us to assume that it is written in the literal sense of the words [used in the documents]."⁷¹ On the other hand the historians can reasonably expect literary and/or religious texts, private letters, speeches, encomia and the like to use words and phrases obliquely, for there to be word-play, literary references, allusions, echoes, and so on. To exegete these texts they state, "Only one general principle can be laid down ... that when the literal sense is absurd, incoherent, or obscure, or in contradiction with the ideas of the author or the facts known to him, then we ought to presume an oblique sense."⁷² Langlois and Seignobos do not demand this, they merely suggest it as a means to assess the likelihood of whether an author is speaking literally. They urge caution and a degree of humility in the historian's conclusions:

But as there is no certain method of solving these problems, we never have a right to say we have discovered all the hidden meanings or seized all the allusions contained in a text; and even when we think we have found the sense, we shall do well to draw no inferences from a necessarily conjectural interpretation. On the other hand, it is necessary to guard against the temptation to look for allegorical meanings everywhere.⁷³

The goal of this critical analysis, therefore, is to acquaint the historian with the document as fully as possible and to understand the author's presentation with increasing clarity.

⁷⁰ Langlois and Seignobos, 146.

⁷¹ Langlois and Seignobos, 151.

⁷² Langlois and Seignobos, 152.

⁷³ Langlois and Seignobos, 153.

Discerning the author's intention helps historians determine what the author's ideas were, but these ideas do not necessarily tell historians about external facts. Langlois and Seignobos stress that even if an author were an eyewitness to what he or she reported, their text merely presents how she or he wished to represent the events in question, not necessarily what they saw nor even what actually happened.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the ubiquitous presence of contradictory statements in various documents forces historians to reflect critically on every document's assertions. Since this process of critical reflection is so central to the historian's work, Langlois and Seignobos devote a significant portion of their *Introduction* to the means of assessing the veracity of a document's statements in general and to evaluating a document's various contradictory statements in particular.

Langlois and Seignobos criticize and reject the criteria of certain predecessors for determining if an author is reliable. These "common notions and vague formulae" include if the author lived contemporaneously with the events on which they report, whether the author was an eyewitness, if the author could have known or been informed about the events, and if they have a general reputation for trustworthiness.⁷⁵ Instead, Langlois and Seignobos prefer the more stringent criteria of *external criticism*. To engage in this quality of historiographic investigation, the historian begins from a posture of "methodical doubt"⁷⁶—today more commonly known as the hermeneutic of suspicion—which is the general, careful, and cautious distrust of statements in the document. They caution against assuming that an author's reliability in one matter indicates his or her reliability in other matters (but see below), and they urge the historian not to trust blindly a document's authenticity.

74 Langlois and Seignobos, 155.

75 Langlois and Seignobos, 156. See especially 156n.1 for a brief list of four historians with whom Langlois and Seignobos disagree. They may overstate their argument in this case, particularly regarding the last item—if the author has a general reputation for trustworthiness. Taking all the proper caution not to assume too much, if an author is demonstrably reliable in the areas where their work can be checked, it is not unreasonable to assume that they may be reliable where they cannot be checked. This is by no means an absolute, and again the modern historian must be cautious in assuming what cannot be demonstrated and furthermore, as I argued in chapter 1, the burden of proof rests on the one making the claim; nevertheless, in cases of singular attestation, i.e. those by definition which cannot be checked by recourse to other sources, the author's general reliability at best suggests or recommends (but does not demonstrate) their reliability where they are the sole source for an assertion.

76 Langlois and Seignobos, 156. They continue, "The historian ought to distrust *a priori* every statement of an author, for he cannot be sure that it is not mendacious or mistaken. ... We must not postpone doubt till it is forced upon us by conflicting statements in documents; we must *begin* by doubting" (157, original emphasis).

Authenticity for the general historian refers “to the [document’s] origin only, not to the contents; to say that a document is authentic is merely to say that its origin is certain, not that its contents are free from error.”⁷⁷

One of Langlois’s and Seignobos’s primary concerns is to determine to the highest degree possible if the author of a document reports “in good faith,” i.e., generally free from falsification (intentional untruth) and from error (unintentional untruth). In any historical document there are numerous assertions which the author presents as fact, regardless of their actual facticity.⁷⁸ A variety of methods can aid historians in determining the origin of statements in order to more carefully evaluate the probability of their facticity, although Langlois and Seignobos confess it is impossible to determine the origin of every “fact”

77 Langlois and Seignobos, 159. It is interesting to note that historical Jesus scholars tend to use “authentic” the other way around, to refer to the veracity of the contents rather than the source’s origin. See the discussion at the beginning of chapter 3 below.

78 Langlois and Seignobos ultimately do not care if the author believed he or she were telling the truth or not: “In practice we rarely need to know what an author believed, unless we are making a special study of his character. We have no direct interest in the author; he is merely the medium through which we reach the external facts he reports. The aim of [historical] criticism is to determine whether the author has reported the facts correctly” (165). For this reason, they do not see a need to draw a distinction between whether or not an author knew he was lying. That being said, they admit it is helpful to enumerate what are the causes of “misstatement” (165).

On the following pages (165–72) they list the general motives an author may have for violating the truth: the author seeks personal advantage, at which point it is incumbent upon the historian to seek what interest the author had in lying, and what interest did the author think there was in lying; “The author was placed in a situation which compelled him to violate truth” (167); the author represents others favorably or unfavorably based on his or her biases, tastes, religious or political preferences; vanity induced the author to violate the truth; the author sought to please or to avoid disturbing his or her audience, or the public; rhetorical distortion.

After detailing several reasons for falsification—the intentional violation of truth—they turn next to the reasons which make an author mistaken (172–77): the author was somehow prevented from accurate observation (and here they note the importance of determining if the author tended to observe wrongly); the author was not well situated for keen observation. The next two are listed under this category of unintentional—i.e., mistaken—statements, but they should probably be categorized under falsification since there is a clear element of intentionality here: the author writes what he could have observed but did not actually; “The fact stated is of such a nature that it could not have been learnt by observation alone” (176), i.e., the statement is based more on inference than observation. “Here we have to do with propositions derived from observations by synthesis or inference: the author can only have arrived at them indirectly; he began with data furnished by observation, and elaborated them by the logical processes of abstraction, generalization, reasoning, calculation” (176). These last two do not seem to refer to malicious intent, but nevertheless indicate intent to present oneself as a witness of what one did not actually witness.

or assertion in historical documents. That being said, they argue there are certain assertions about which it is difficult to lie. To root out these assertions they devise a series of questions or stipulations “intended to distinguish, in the mass of alleged facts, those which by their nature are little subject to the risk of alteration, and which are therefore very probably correct.”⁷⁹ These stipulations serve as tests, i.e., types of thought experiment precisely of the kind Gaddis described.⁸⁰

Their first test is “The fact is of a nature to render falsehood improbable,” that is, the author asserts something where the historian can detect no (obvious) motive to lie.⁸¹ On the basis of common sense they posit an author is unlikely to lie when he or she believes a lie or false impression would be useless or unconvincing. Following their first stipulation, they pose their first of three questions for determining whether an author has concocted a lie or is telling the truth:

Is the fact stated manifestly prejudicial to the effect which the author wished to produce? Does it run counter to the interest, the vanity, the sentiments, the literary tastes of the author and his group; or to the opinions which he made a point of not offending? In such a case there is probability of good faith.⁸²

An assertion presented as a “fact” that runs contrary to the author’s desired effect or an assertion which may oppose the interests of the author and the readers would naturally include statements that are *embarrassing* to the author, the readers, and/or the protagonist. For the sake of comparison, recall Craig Evans’s definition of the criterion of embarrassment, “material that is perceived by the evangelists as awkward, as in need of qualification, and perhaps even deletion.”⁸³ This test that Langlois and Seignobos recommend includes some material that typically meets the *criterion of embarrassment*; something “manifestly prejudicial” to the author’s effect might present an otherwise positively portrayed protagonist in a negative, awkward, or embarrassing light. And yet, in the very next breath they warn:

79 Langlois and Seignobos, 185.

80 Gaddis, 39–43.

81 Langlois and Seignobos, 185–86.

82 Langlois and Seignobos, 186.

83 Evans, “Recent Developments,” 18.

But in the application of this criterion there is danger; it has often been wrongly used, and in two ways. One of these is to take for a confession what was meant for a boast, ... or [the author] may have wished to calumniate fellow-citizens who did not belong to his own party, or co-religionists who did not belong to his own sect.⁸⁴

Clearly Langlois and Seignobos are under no illusions that material that runs counter to the vanity or sentiments of the author or readers (including that which is embarrassing) is intrinsically true; but they do argue strongly that such statements are (at the very least) worthy to be considered more likely true than false especially when an author who presents his or her subject generally positively states something awkward or embarrassing about the subject. Furthermore, they restrict the use of this criterion—their term—only “to cases where [historians] know exactly what *effect* [the author] wished to produce, and in what *group* he was mainly interested.”⁸⁵ Again, Langlois and Seignobos do not believe they have a foolproof criterion here, but with the proper level of caution they present a justifiable case for considering material that runs counter to the interests of the author and his or her group—or in other words material that is potentially embarrassing—to be likely true.

Langlois’s and Seignobos’s second question focuses on “facts” so pervasive that an attempt at falsification would be easily discovered or readily apparent.

Was the fact stated so obviously known to the public that the author, even if tempted to falsehood, would have been restrained by the certainty of being detected? This is the case with facts which are easy to verify, which are not remote in point of time or space, which apply to a wide area or a long period, especially if the public had any interest in verifying them.⁸⁶

The types of facts they envision are the stuff of common knowledge, requiring little effort for corroboration. Again, however, Langlois and Seignobos counsel discretion for “the fear of detection is only an intermittent check, opposed by interest whenever the author has any motive for deceiving.”⁸⁷ Because the threat of deception—intentional or otherwise—is ever present, they insist this criterion not be followed slavishly but with the caveat that the historian

84 Langlois and Seignobos, 186. These lines follow right after the end of the previous block quote. Throughout this section they cite “criteria” and immediately offer caution in their application, indicating their awareness of the relatively tentative nature of historiography.

85 Langlois and Seignobos, 186 (original emphasis).

86 Langlois and Seignobos, 186–87.

87 Langlois and Seignobos, 187.

must beware if the author otherwise had a reputation for bold-faced or malicious falsehood, or if the author generally reported reliably.⁸⁸ Later, they pose the same question slightly differently: “Is [the fact] expressed in such general terms that superficial observation was enough to discover it?—as the mere existence of a man, a city, a people, a custom.”⁸⁹ Finally, they ask if the fact stated is incidental or inconsequential to the author,⁹⁰ such that there is no discernible reason to falsify that particular matter.

Next, they pose the following question concerning material that contradicts the author’s or the audience’s expectations:

The fact was of such a nature that it would not have been stated unless it was true. A man does not declare that he has seen something contrary to his expectations and habits of mind unless observation has compelled him to admit it. A fact which seems very improbable to the man who relates it has a good chance of being true.⁹¹

The kind of material Langlois and Seignobos hope to isolate here is material that runs counter to what the historian could otherwise reasonably expect the author to have stated. Their criterion overlaps significantly with the *criterion of dissimilarity*: material which runs counter to the author’s “expectations and habits of mind” is that which is dissimilar to what he or she, under other circumstances, would have anticipated. They appeal to Jesus’s teaching as an example of this rule:

We have, then, to ask whether the fact stated was in contradiction with the author’s opinions, whether it is a phenomenon of a kind unknown to him, an action or a custom which seems unintelligible to him; whether it is a saying whose import transcends his intelligence, such as the sayings of Christ reported in the Gospels.⁹²

88 I should note here how earlier they chided historians of previous generations for assuming an author could be reliable in a matter if the author had a general reputation for reliability (Langlois and Seignobos, 156). Ultimately their problem is with the uncritical assumption of an author’s reliability.

89 Langlois and Seignobos, 188.

90 Langlois and Seignobos, 187–88. This is similar to what Schröter notes (see chapter 3 below): although the Gospels were not likely written in Jewish Palestine, gospel traditions that exhibit features of a Palestinian environment are unlikely to be free creations, i.e., there is no discernible reason for the evangelists to have falsified these features.

91 Langlois and Seignobos, 188.

92 Langlois and Seignobos, 188.

Pointing to Jesus's teaching, Langlois and Seignobos indicate that Jesus repeatedly answering his interlocutors with manifest clarity runs counter to what would be expected of Jesus given his lack of formal education.

Langlois and Seignobos also discuss at length how historians can determine the independence of sources, i.e., if two statements in different documents are truly independent or if one is a reproduction of the other (or perhaps if both rely on a third source). If statements derive from a common source, the result is that historians are left with only one truly useful source.⁹³ They therefore stress the historian must not trust the impulse to assume independence of sources, they must demonstrate it.⁹⁴ The quality of corroboration they urge historians to value is not "a perfect similarity between two narratives, but an occasional coincidence between two narratives which only partially resemble each other."⁹⁵ This is somewhat of a paradox, they admit, because one's natural tendency is to seek broad and sweeping corroboration. But they express critical incredulity at substantially coincidental accounts from (ostensibly) independent observers: "The details of a social fact are so manifold, and there are so many different ways of looking at the same fact, that two independent observers cannot possibly give completely coincident accounts; if two statements present the same details in the same order, they must be derived from a common observation; different observations are bound to diverge somewhere."⁹⁶ Additionally, they believe if a fact could have only had one observer, then all accounts must derive from that one observer.

Langlois and Seignobos argue that historians can only be sure that observations are independent if they are "contained in different documents, written by different authors, who belonged to different groups, and worked under different conditions."⁹⁷ These stipulations may demand too much, but if these conditions are met, there exists a high degree of probability the historian has encountered truly independent attestation. Thus, they affirm the value of multiple and independent attestation, which is defined as *when two or more statements originate from independent sources and evince agreement in major and/or*

93 They may overstate their argument: the author who employs another known source in his or her own work, following that source's authority, provides an early commentary on the primary source by indicating their trust in that source's reliability as far as they followed and reproduced it. For example, given how often Matthew and Luke follow Mark, it is reasonable to argue that because they believed Mark's account was generally reliable, Matthew and Luke serve as early witnesses testifying to Mark's reliability.

94 Langlois and Seignobos, 201.

95 Langlois and Seignobos, 201.

96 Langlois and Seignobos, 200–01.

97 Langlois and Seignobos, 202–03.

minor points. There is an additional feature of interest in their qualification, namely that the authors in question “belonged to different groups.” Different groups need not be hostile, but when there is animosity between groups—e.g., early Jesus followers and some Pharisees—which nevertheless hold certain views in common, here we have the necessary conditions for the “view common to friend and foe” criterion espoused by Sanders, Davies, and Goodacre.⁹⁸

It should be clear by now that for each of Langlois’s and Seignobos’s stipulations, they urge caution in their application. Although in a given instance some criteria might prove more useful than others, no single criterion dominates the rest, and each serves its role in certain situations. This is a far cry from the dogmatism of scholars such as Norman Perrin who assures us that the only sure results are those ensured by the application of double dissimilarity.⁹⁹

To summarize Langlois and Seignobos: amongst other means, they recommend a few criteria for historians to employ in order to assess the probability of statements in historical documents: a criterion of multiple and independent attestation, as well as a more nuanced version thereof in the principle “views common to friend and foe”; a criterion of embarrassment; and finally a criterion of counter-to-expectation, which I argue is essentially a variation of dissimilarity. Later general historians explicitly espouse these criteria or implicitly affirm the principles underlying these criteria. Below I track each criterion as later historians discuss them in their works on general historiographical methodology.

2.1 *Criterion of Multiple Attestation*

Langlois and Seignobos are not the only historians to discuss and espouse a criterion of multiple attestation. Historian Gilbert Garraghan argues there is no true corroboration without independent testimony. “If witnesses are to corroborate one another, their testimony must be independent. Merely to repeat another person’s testimony adds nothing to its weight.”¹⁰⁰ Implicit in Garraghan’s statement is the process of weighing, rather than simply counting, sources; methodologically, weighing sources coheres with the regular practice of text critics where prominence is given not necessarily to the greatest number of witnesses but to the most valuable and consistently most reliable witnesses

98 E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 330–33. See also Mark Goodacre, “What Is the Criterion of ‘Views Common to Friend and Foe’?,” *NT Pod: A Historical Approach to the New Testament*, February 19, 2014, <http://podacre.blogspot.com/2014/02/nt-pod-70-what-is-criterion-of-views.html>.

99 Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 39.

100 Gilbert J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method*, ed. Jean Delanglez (New York: Fordham University Press, 1946), 307.

(for textual critics, the most valuable reading being that which explains all the others; often—though not always—this is one of the demonstrably earliest readings).¹⁰¹ Critical analysis of the testimony (i.e., the statements under consideration for historicity) enables the historian to isolate points of dependence from another source. Garraghan helpfully, if somewhat generally, discusses the rationale for multiple and independent attestation by noting that “Psychology furnishes the datum that two or more persons will not, independently of one another, invent the same alleged fact, or in their reports of it, differ in precisely the same way from the objective truth.”¹⁰²

In Louis Gottschalk's primer on historical method, he discusses the finer points of establishing a document's general credibility, the process of internal criticism. The historian's first concern is to ascertain a set of particular, usable facts to address their topic or question; this is the technical analysis of sources, the process of examining documents which yields “credible details to be fitted into a hypothesis or context.”¹⁰³ Analysis begins with examining the relevant particulars for credibility.¹⁰⁴ Gottschalk defines credibility as the same as facticity or historicity; a *credible* particular is “as close to what actually happened as we can learn from a critical examination of the best available sources. ... In other words, the historian establishes *verisimilitude* rather than *objective truth*.”¹⁰⁵ A historical fact is a particular stated within or inferred from a historical document that the historian believes credible after employing the relevant tests of historiographic method.¹⁰⁶

101 For text critics weighing manuscripts, cf. Metzger and Ehrman, 208; D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 279. Connections with historiographic method and textual criticism will arise in chapter 5 (see below).

102 Garraghan, 308. He continues, “The more numerous the independent witnesses, the greater the certainty of the matter they report in common, since agreement between them increasingly excludes the possibility of error” (308–09). Gottschalk speaks of “objective truth” as well, but argues the historian cannot establish objective truth (see below). “Objective truth” for Garraghan in this context refers to what actually happened, not the historian's ability to perfectly recount what actually happened.

103 Gottschalk, 139.

104 Gottschalk tends to use “particular” in an absolute sense, with the connotation of a particular fact or datum useful for the historian's reconstruction.

105 Gottschalk, 139–40 (my emphasis). It is worth noting that Gottschalk nuances the term “credible particular” to indicate a degree of uncertainty since the historian can so infrequently achieve full certainty on many matters.

106 See Gottschalk, 150–61 for the full discussion of establishing credibility. To summarize briefly, Gottschalk poses four questions (quoted from 150): Was the ultimate source of the detail (the primary witness) able to tell the truth? Was the primary witness willing to tell the truth? Is the primary witness accurately reported with regard to the detail under

These relevant tests focus on, among other things, the process of corroboration of statements in various historical sources. Once a historian has drawn out a particular—i.e., a(n apparent) fact or datum—by means of external and internal critical procedures, the historian must still verify that particular. As Langlois and Seignobos, and Garraghan before him, Gottschalk recommends a criterion of multiple and independent attestation to verify a particular datum as an established fact: “Although there is a strong presumption that [the particular] is trustworthy, the general rule of historians ... is to accept as historical only those particulars which rest upon *the independent testimony of two or more reliable witnesses*.”¹⁰⁷ Gottschalk is not unaware of the difficulties in establishing agreement, for agreement does not necessarily indicate independent attestation. Copying or influence by one source, or both sources drawing

examination? And, Is there any independent corroboration of the detail under examination? He then addresses these questions on 150–61. Succinctly, the historian needs to assess the author’s ability to tell the truth which he or she can do by considering the following: the witness’s proximity (geographical and chronological) to the event; the time elapsed between event and recording; the mental and physical capacities necessary to be competent (with specific reference to the ability to approximate numbers); the degree of the author’s attention. Additionally the historian-as-investigator must avoid leading or loaded questions and circular reasoning, and be mindful of a document’s egocentrism. Finally, they argue the inability of a document to present the truth tends to lead “to errors of omission, rather than commission, because of lack of completeness or lack of balance in observation, recollection, or narrative. Such errors may give a picture that is out of perspective because it subordinates or fails to include some important things and over-emphasizes those it does include” (155).

Regarding the author’s willingness to tell the truth, Gottschalk urges the historian to be wary of the interested witness, who might profit or otherwise benefit from untruth. If a witness is unaware of the benefit they may receive, there may be certain types of bias in play: *stadium*, favorable bias; or *odium* or *ira*: unfavorable bias. It is therefore helpful to know as much about the witness’s religious, political, social standing, etc., to ascertain their biases. Furthermore, Gottschalk argues the expectation or anticipation of a person or group to behave a certain way may lead a witness to exaggerate their similarities with the author’s expectations or forget divergences from the author’s expectations (160). Other factors affecting the author’s truthfulness include: the nature of the intended audience; the literary style of the author may lend itself toward exaggeration and therefore bending (if not breaking) the truth with the result that literary conventions may “sometimes oblige witnesses to depart from strict veracity” (158). Inexact dating due to convention is a specific example of “conventional untruth” (159). And once again, the “unwillingness to tell the truth, whether intentional or subconscious, leads to misstatements of fact more often than omissions of fact. ... [E]ven the worst witness may occasionally tell the truth and that it is the historian’s business to extract every iota of relevant truth, if he can” (160).

107 Gottschalk, 166 (original emphasis). Garraghan speaks more highly of singular attestation than others (cf. Garraghan, 294–95).

from a third source can lead to agreement as well, and so he warns, "Unless the independence of the observers is established, agreement may be confirmation of a lie or of a mistake rather than corroboration of a fact."¹⁰⁸ If a particular can pass this test, Gottschalk believes the historian can be confident they have a well-established fact.

Writing in the middle of World War II, French historian Marc Bloch's posthumously published *The Historian's Craft* is a delightful and engaging treatment of the historian's profession.¹⁰⁹ Although somewhat lighter on specific methodological criteria than Langlois, Seignobos, Garraghan, and Gottschalk, Bloch nevertheless affirms the importance of multiple and independent attestation. While discussing the application of statistical analysis in historical research Bloch uses an example of determining prices in a given time and place: he imagines three historians taking different data and averaging market prices and argues that, if their sums coincide with the others', "we should conclude that each of them furnishes a more or less exact picture of the trend."¹¹⁰ In this particular example of specialized research, Bloch describes what is essentially the criterion of multiple and independent attestation, without naming it as such.

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, historians continued to discuss the minutiae of their methods in various guides and handbooks. Robert Jones Shafer begins with a note of caution that an "authentic" source—i.e., one that genuinely comes from the source it claims to represent—may still mislead or lie. The historian must, as best as possible, distinguish between truth and falsehood in a source: "This is the task of internal criticism: to determine the credibility of evidence."¹¹¹ Internal criticism begins with understanding the literal meaning of the document; context therefore determines meanings for words, customs, and the like. Sources of error can consist of ignorance, bias, falsification, failure of the senses, cultural difference, self-delusion and mental unbalance, mutilation or misuse of evidence.

¹⁰⁸ Gottschalk, 168. Cf. Garraghan, 307, for an additional discussion of dependence.

¹⁰⁹ Bloch's personal and professional story as a historian serving as an officer in the French military during World War II is fascinating. See the introduction to *The Historian's Craft* by Joseph Strayer, vii–xii. The book's dedicatee and fellow French historian Lucien Febvre helpfully remarks on the status of the book's arrangement after Bloch's untimely death at the hands of the Nazis on June 16, 1944 in Lyons with twenty-six other French soldiers (viii–ix)—a mere week-and-a-half after Allied forces stormed the beaches during the D-Day invasion.

¹¹⁰ Bloch, 119.

¹¹¹ Robert Jones Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3rd ed. (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1980), 149.

Error can be partial or total, intentional or unintentional. Key to the historian's task is to observe details, and so the ability of the witness to observe matters is paramount. The witness must have been physically capable of observing what was reported and possess the "social ability to observe" the matter at hand which "concerns the familiarity of the witness with the subject matter, and his willingness to observe to the best of his ability."¹¹²

Regarding internal criticism, Shafer urges historians to inquire how the report in the document under investigation was made. The historian needs to be aware of the time elapsed between the event and its recording, as well as the purpose or reason for recording the event. Distortion of the truth can arise due to a number of reasons, chief among them are bias, destruction of evidence (intentional or not), and cultural misperceptions.¹¹³

When the historian is ready for a more complex analysis, she or he begins by comparing sources to find what types of corroboration or contradiction there may be.¹¹⁴ Shafer admits that corroboration is by no means easy to establish, but it offers the surest results for the historian: "Difficult as this process [of corroboration] can be, it occasions less doubt than the problem of the single source, where we have neither corroboration nor contradiction."¹¹⁵ In other words, Shafer appeals to multiple attestation when possible, for this criterion yields less difficulty for the historian than does singular attestation (which is not insurmountable, only more difficult to verify).

In a series of essays published the following year, fellow historian Barbara Tuchman also espouses the importance of corroborative detail. She notes "Corroborative detail is the great corrective. Without it historical narrative and interpretation, both, may slip easily into the invalid. ... It forces the historian who uses and respects it to cleave to the truth, or as much as he can find out of the truth. It keeps him from soaring off the ground into theories of his own invention."¹¹⁶

Two historians of the early twenty-first century, Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, list the following seven rules derived from Langlois and Seignobos and nineteenth-century German historian Ernst Bernheim:

¹¹² Shafer, 154.

¹¹³ See Shafer, 159–66, other forms and examples of distortions.

¹¹⁴ Shafer observes, "A major part of historical method relates to efforts to find corroborative evidence and weigh its quality, or to resolve problems arising from contradictory evidence, by corroboration for one explanation or another" (168).

¹¹⁵ Shafer, 158.

¹¹⁶ Barbara W. Tuchman, *Practicing History: Selected Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 34.

1. If the sources all agree about an event, historians can consider the event proved.
2. However, majority does not rule; even if most sources relate events in one way, that version will not prevail unless it passes the tests of critical textual analysis. ...
3. The source whose account can be confirmed by reference to outside authorities in some of its parts can be trusted in its entirety if it is impossible similarly to confirm the entire text.
4. When two sources disagree on a particular point, the historian will prefer the source with the most 'authority'—i.e., the source created by the expert or the eyewitness. ...
5. Eyewitnesses are, in general, to be preferred, especially in circumstances where the ordinary observer could have accurately reported what transpired and, more specifically, when they deal with facts known by most contemporaries.
6. If two independently created sources agree on a matter, the reliability of each is measurably enhanced.
7. When two sources disagree (and there is no other means of evaluation), then historians take the source which seems to accord best with common sense.¹¹⁷

Howell and Prevenier quickly admit these rules are not without their problems: historians today are wary of the type of assured, scientific (or positivistic) proof many nineteenth-century historians sought by means of applying rules like these, but an intellectual process of this nature can nonetheless aid historians in the very kinds of thought experiments Gaddis recommended. Following their presentation of these rules, Howell and Prevenier demonstrate how some historians of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries have used these very rules.¹¹⁸

In light of our discussion of multiple attestation, this principle or criterion manifests in a few of Howell's and Prevenier's rules. The basis of rule 1 is the multiple attestation of witnesses. The importance of witnesses' independence is implied here: historians generally prefer original sources and find later

¹¹⁷ Howell and Prevenier, 70–71. They refer to Langlois and Seignobos as well as Ernst Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der Historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie. Mit Nachweis der wichtigsten Quellen und Hilfsmittel zum Studium der Geschichte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1903), as the sources for these seven rules for source comparison, but they cite no specific page numbers. Nowhere do Langlois and Seignobos give this precise list of seven things enumerated in this particular manner; nevertheless they do discuss these things (see above).

¹¹⁸ See Howell and Prevenier, 71–79, especially 71–73.

sources which copy or show influence by earlier sources to be less helpful (if not altogether useless).¹¹⁹ They may overstate their case, for why must a later source be judged useless when the author obviously considered the parent source worthy of affirmation? Are not these secondary sources early commentaries on earlier sources? Regardless, rules 3 and 6 further indicate the value of multiple attestation.

Finally, in a fairly recent work on the methods and aims of historiographic research, British historian John Tosh discusses the importance of determining a source's reliability. In a brief section on weighing and comparing sources, Tosh urges the historian not to rely on a sole, authoritative source, but to use all available sources by rooting out their "hidden traces in the records," those incidental details which give clues to the historian the author never intended.¹²⁰ Knowledge of a variety of sources is therefore invaluable for the historian. "The need for primary evidence from 'insiders' as well as 'outsiders' is an important guideline for historical research, with wide ramifications."¹²¹ This particular guideline draws quite close to the conditions for the criterion "view common to friend and foe," which is a particular manifestation of the criterion of multiple and independent attestation.

For well over a century, historians have discussed the importance of multiple and independent attestation as a means for establishing the probability of a historical fact. Despite some instances of overconfidence in this principle (especially among the nineteenth-century historians), none of the authors above espoused total confidence in the historian's ability to use this criterion to establish a fact *with full certainty*. Nevertheless, a clear and general rule emerges from the survey of historiographic method above: if a variety of independently generated sources, which have been verified by the processes of external and internal criticism, affirm the same particular(s) about a given event or a certain person, historians can reasonably expect that piece of information is highly probably true.

119 Howell and Prevenier state, "The essential problem here is distinguishing among the useful, less useful, and useless source. Generally, historians consider sources to be useless (for reporting purposes) if they derive from other, usually older, sources. Although it is sometimes hard to decide if a source is in some way derived from another source, once that assessment is made, eliminating the dependent source is usually easy. It is much harder, however, to rank sources that all seem to be 'original' in that each provides an independent account of the particular events in question" (70). This last statement clearly implies the validity of multiple and independent attestation.

120 Tosh, 111.

121 Tosh, 110.

2.2 *Criterion of Historical Coherence*

The historians reviewed above have tended to describe multiple and independent attestation primarily in terms of multiple authors' explicit statements related to the same subject: to simplify, when one past author said X about Y, and another author writing independently corroborated X about Y, modern historians ordinarily view X as *probably* true if there is no clear evidence of X's falsehood. One example from the NT and pagan historiography is Claudius's expulsion of Jewish persons from Rome, cited in Acts 18:2 and corroborated by Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.¹²² But Tosh's discussion about hidden traces and incidental details relates to another kind or quality of corroboration, that of general or historical coherence. While discussing the principle of explicit multiple attestation, Gottschalk affirms the value of a more general degree of corroboration: "*conformity or agreement* with other known historical or scientific facts is often the decisive test of evidence, whether of one or of more witnesses."¹²³ The sources for "other known historical or scientific facts" include documents, as much of the discussion of the criterion of multiple attestation above clearly implies; but the sources for this quality of critical comparison are not limited to documents, for historians can use a variety of sources to establish a more general or historical coherence like coins, popular or well-known customs, archaeological evidence, and so on.

Garraghan presents an essentially similar view on general or historical coherence. He refers to the relationship between testimony and "remains," by which he refers not only to realia but also to the socio-cultural and historical context of the sources or witness in question. Along these lines he speaks confidently of the Gospels' many corroborations with what can be known of first-century CE Judea and Galilee. "Thus, the Gospel accounts, with their wealth of detail on the topography, customs, and manner of the Holy Land, are borne out by archaeological, linguistic, cultural, and other vestiges, to an extent which places their trustworthiness beyond dispute."¹²⁴

122 For NT scholars perspectives on Luke's and others' statements regarding the expulsion, see the discussions in Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf, repr. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 167–68; for a robust excursus see Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 539–44; with ample detail and discussion, see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015), 2697–711; and for a more cautious view, see Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 350 and 350–51n.137.

123 Gottschalk, 168 (original emphasis).

124 Garraghan, 309.

Bloch argues comparison is the foundation of all critical study,¹²⁵ and he demonstrates just how a historian can verify (or refute) conflicting statements from multiple sources by comparing what can be known about a particular subject with what other sources indicate regarding the subject's character, customs, preferences, etc. Using an entertaining example from French history, Bloch compares an account of a certain military officer's heroic deed in his memoirs with the records of his orders from decades earlier. Bloch further compares the extant records of troop movements, the reports from the opposing army, and even Napoleon's correspondence. The officer's own petition for promotion, submitted not long after the purported heroism, omits any mention of bravery above and beyond the call of duty. Bloch believes it is probable "that, much later, the old warrior, *whose boasts are notorious in other connections*, had won another bout with the truth."¹²⁶ By considering the officer's "notorious [boasts] in other connections" Bloch is arguing that what one episode revealed of the officer's character and actions corroborated or cohered with what others witnessed regarding the officer's character and actions in different situations. This is clearly an application of the criterion of general or historical coherence.

Historians Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff imply the validity of the criterion of historical coherence when they discuss the value of small details that corroborate with previous knowledge.¹²⁷ They argue the assessment of a document's general truthfulness can increase with the presence of small corroborations, but this type of circumstantial evidence is by no means totally reliable. Nevertheless, sometimes it is necessary for the historian to wriggle facts out of manuscripts by looking for incidental corroborations.¹²⁸ These incidental corroborations can include minor details that suggest or (more strongly) indicate the contextual plausibility of what an author asserted. Similarly, Salevouris and Furay, another publishing team of historians, affirm the value of unexpected corroborating knowledge: "a primary source is most valuable when the purpose for which it was compiled is at the furthest remove from the purpose of the historian."¹²⁹ Hyperbole notwithstanding, their point is to focus

125 "It was the collation of the stories of the Gospel which gave rise to Biblical exegesis. At the bottom of nearly all criticism there is a problem of comparison" (Bloch, 110).

126 Bloch, 111 (my emphasis).

127 Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 112.

128 Barzun and Graff, 113–15. Later in their chapter on verification, they describe the process of authenticating a document, which includes among other things corroborating evidence for and against authenticity, once again implying the criterion of coherence (see 124–29).

129 Salevouris and Furay, 177, citing Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 177.

on unintended corroborations among sources and, as Barzun and Graff argue, these corroborations derive from a variety of sources.¹³⁰ Similarly, Howell and Prevenier praise the contributions to modern historiography of Jan Vansina, who demonstrated the relative stability of oral histories.¹³¹ Howell and Prevenier find some value in oral history when these sources *cohere* with what can be known from other sources: “historians can place trust in oral sources only to the extent that they can be verified by means of external evidence of another kind, such as archaeological, linguistic, or cultural.”¹³²

The criterion of coherence thus focuses on corroborations of a smaller, less significant kind and not on explicit statements (see the example above regarding historical documents which state X about subject or topic Y). Instead, as historians utilize this criterion the focus is on general knowledge that coheres with what can be known about a subject from other sources of information such as documents, but also from numismatic and archaeological evidence as well. This quality of incidental corroborations is substantially similar to Theissen’s and Winter’s criterion of contextual plausibility, a sub-criterion for their broader criterion of historical plausibility.¹³³ The “context” of contextual plausibility refers broadly to the subject’s socio-historical context and to a subject’s distinct, individual characteristics. The criterion of general or historical coherence I have described above—and which is evident in the historians’ work above—is therefore substantially similar and operates in much the same way as Theissen’s and Winter’s sub-criteria of contextual appropriateness and contextual distinctiveness.

130 Along similar lines, Carsten Claussen, “Turning Water to Wine: Re-Reading the Miracle at the Wedding in Cana,” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 73–97, points to a number of incidental corroborations in the Gospel of John and the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1–11), on 89–95. Claussen argues these corroborations include references to Jesus’s family which relate to other statements about his home in Nazareth and allow for comparisons with Jewish wedding practices in the first century CE. Additionally, archaeological excavations have turned up water jars similar to the composition and volume of the stone jars in John 2 (Claussen cites Jonathan L. Reed, “Stone Vessels and Gospel Texts: Purity and Socio-Economics in John 2,” in *Zeichen Aus Text Und Stein: Studien Auf Dem Weg Zu Einer Archäologie Des Neuen Testaments*, TANZ 42 [Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2003], 381–401).

131 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Two NT scholars who have brought Vansina’s work to bear on memories and traditions of Jesus are Byrskog, *Story as History* (30–33) and Bauckham, 33–34, 271–74.

132 Cf. Howell and Prevenier, 26–27 (quote from 26).

133 See the summary of the criterion of historical plausibility in Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 210–12, and the discussion above in chapter 1.

2.3 *Criterion of Embarrassment*

As I argued above regarding Langlois's and Seignobos's discussion of verifying facts, their following statement affirms the principle underlying what historical Jesus scholars have long referred to as the criterion of embarrassment: "Is the fact stated manifestly *prejudicial to the effect which the author wished to produce*? Does it run *counter to the interest, the vanity, the sentiments, the literary tastes of the author and his group*; or to the opinions which he made a point of not offending?"¹³⁴ A fact which runs "counter to the vanity" of the protagonist, the author, and/or the author's intended audience undeniably includes a fact with the potential to embarrass the protagonist, the author, and/or the author's intended audience. Gottschalk addresses this same issue as he describes the conditions generally favorable to a document's credibility. He states, "More dependably, when a statement is *prejudicial to a witness*, his dear ones, or his cases, it is likely to be truthful."¹³⁵ Gottschalk affirms the same principle as Langlois and Seignobos, namely that statements which counter or cast the protagonist in a negative light—when, it should be understood, the author otherwise generally favors the protagonist—are likely true.

Despite some support for this criterion, not every historian who discusses the potential for the protagonist's embarrassment favors this principle. Shafer urges caution: "Researchers are happy to find witnesses making statements damaging to themselves, supposing that this will not be done unless an unavoidable truth must be displayed. But men may so testify inadvertently, or in fright or hysteria, or to distract attention from other matters."¹³⁶ Shafer rightly warns against taking such statements at face value. Langlois and Seignobos also advise against this criterion's uncritical use in two main ways: first, the historian must beware of the author's exaggeration, and to whatever degree possible they must know the author's intended effect. They insist "This criterion must therefore be restricted to cases where we know exactly what *effect* he wished to produce, and in what *group* he was mainly interested."¹³⁷ In light of these cautions the historian must not assume the reasons for the embarrassing statement are self-evident; the historian must determine as

¹³⁴ Langlois and Seignobos, 186 (my emphasis).

¹³⁵ Gottschalk, 161. For other conditions favorable to credibility, Gottschalk includes when the fact is a matter of indifference to the author; common knowledge (but here they urge the historian not to argue from silence); and incidental knowledge, the kind of statements that indirectly indicate a fact. This last condition is essentially the criterion of coherence.

¹³⁶ Shafer, 158.

¹³⁷ Langlois and Seignobos, 186.

much as possible what the author intended to communicate about the protagonist and how the author intended the audience to receive the potentially embarrassing statement.

For comparison, we can draw an analogy with Jesus research. That which is embarrassing is something that runs contrary to the author's or readers' expectations in a way that casts or is perceived to cast a negative or unfavorable light on the protagonist, in our case Jesus. According to common sense, so the rationale goes, it is unlikely early followers of Jesus would invent sayings or situations which proved embarrassing for Jesus, and thus material of this nature is probably "authentic," i.e., reliable. As I noted in chapter 1, scholars skeptical of this criterion frequently critique the embarrassment criterion due to the inability to determine what precisely would have been considered embarrassing; moreover, the very presence of "embarrassing" material suggests it was not embarrassing enough to be omitted. Allison typifies these critiques: "We must face the surprising fact that all of the supposedly embarrassing facts or words are found in the Jesus tradition itself. This means they were not sufficiently disconcerting to be expurgated."¹³⁸ Based on our inability to know for certain what would have embarrassed early Jesus followers Allison believes we would be better off letting this criterion die.¹³⁹ But surely Jesus's crucifixion provided at least some potential for embarrassment to his early followers (despite the eagerness for martyrdom among certain later followers), and that Jesus's harsh critiques of the disciples in Mark appear to be softened in Matthew and Luke further indicate what was perceived to be embarrassing. On the other hand are Theissen and Winter who argue the resistance to tendencies of the tradition, i.e. the persistence of materials contradicting the interests of early Christians, serves a valuable role in establishing the plausibility of effects—one of their sub-criteria for historical plausibility.¹⁴⁰ Despite Allison's and others' valid concerns, it is nevertheless reasonable to believe historians can have at least some idea of which things were likely to embarrass or run counter to the interests of authors, their subjects, and/or the audiences of certain sources.

138 Dale C. Allison, "How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity," in *HSJ*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3–30, at 5–6.

139 This is essentially Rodríguez's point in his "The Embarrassing Truth About Jesus: The Criterion of Embarrassment and the Failure of Historical Authenticity," in *JCDA*, 132–51.

140 Theissen and Winter, 211.

2.4 *Criterion of Dissimilarity*

Three decades ago, Dennis Polkow argued embarrassment was a nuanced manifestation or expression of the dissimilarity criterion.¹⁴¹ While embarrassment highlights particularly the awkwardness or discomfiture produced by a statement, dissimilarity focuses more generally on what the author and/or audience did not, or perhaps would not, expect. Returning once again to Langlois's and Seignobos's criteria for verifying claims in historical documents, they argue that historians can reasonably expect to find a true statement where the author has reported something contrary to his or her expectations: "A man does not declare that he has seen something contrary to his expectations and habits of mind unless observation has compelled him to admit it. A fact which seems very improbable to the man who relates it has a good chance of being true."¹⁴² A fact which seems "very improbable" to an author who nevertheless reports it includes that which is counterintuitive to one's socio-cultural and/or religious milieu; it is, in essence, a fact dissimilar to the author's expectations. Langlois and Seignobos helpfully explain what they mean by "improbable," even using Jesus's teaching in the Gospels as an example.¹⁴³ Gottschalk affirms the same principle, that "statements [which] are *contrary to the witness's expectations or anticipations*, they have a high degree of credibility."¹⁴⁴

While commenting generally on critical historical method, Bloch asserts the critical method demands evidence be in essential agreement or alignment with other evidence before being deemed true: the historian ought to utilize the criteria of multiple attestation and/or historical coherence when possible. But essential agreement is by no means an absolute rule, for surprise and dissimilarity are inherent to discovery; "A seeming contradiction between a new piece of evidence and its surroundings may well have its source only in a temporary defect in our knowledge."¹⁴⁵ His caution against dogmatism in using similarity or dissimilarity as stringent rules calls into question the negative

141 Dennis Polkow, "Method and Criteria for Historical Jesus Research," *SBLSP* 26 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1987), 336–56, at 341. Meier says the criterion of discontinuity (i.e. dissimilarity) is "closely allied to the criterion of embarrassment" (1:171). In Rodríguez's "Embarrassing Truth," he attributes Tom Holmén with saying embarrassment is "a special case of dissimilarity to Christianity" citing Holmén, "Authenticity Criteria," *EHJ*, 44–54, at 44. On this particular page, however, Holmén is not speaking for himself, he is listing and summarizing Meier's assessment of embarrassment. Later on, though, Holmén does refer to embarrassment as "a special case of dissimilarity to Christianity" (49) and subsumes it within dissimilarity to Christianity, no longer to treat it as a criterion in its own right.

142 Langlois and Seignobos, 188.

143 Langlois and Seignobos, 188.

144 Gottschalk, 164 (original emphasis).

145 Bloch, 121.

uses of the criterion of dissimilarity: as many have observed, what qualifies in the Jesus tradition as material dissimilar to Judaism may simply reflect our limited knowledge of first-century Judaism rather than an actual fissure between Jesus's teaching and that of other rabbis or Jewish schools of thought.¹⁴⁶ Bloch values essential agreement (similarity) but also allows for dissimilarity due to the historian's imperfect knowledge of his or her subject and/or the subject's historical, socio-cultural, and/or intellectual milieu. He argues:

The principle of reasoning from similarity loses none of its force. It is only essential that a more exact analysis should distinguish the range of possible divergence, while making clear the necessary points of similitude. For all individual originality has its limits. The style of Pascal belongs to him alone; but his grammar and the stock of his vocabulary belong to his time.¹⁴⁷

Bloch thus sees many of the same problems with the uncritical or overzealous use of the criterion of dissimilarity—as Jesus researchers have noted for decades.

3 **Summary of Methods for Verification in General Historiographical Methodology**

The discussions I have reviewed span both sides of the twentieth century. At times, an over-optimism clearly pervades the method of historians such as Langlois and Seignobos. At several points they seem to assume too much of the historian's ability to verify external facts or to divine more obtuse matters, such as the author's true meaning and precise intended effect. But as often as they may be guilty of the same overconfidence, they routinely caution against blindly trusting the criteria they propose. Tucker chides Langlois and Seignobos for assuming "an outdated philosophy of science that was inductive and empiricist. ... They were wrong in their understanding of science, as physicists and chemists are not able to observe electrons any more than historians can observe historical events." Despite this criticism, in the very next lines Tucker affirms the value of their work: their anachronistic approach to science does not negate their correct descriptions and comparisons with how

146 See above: Morna D. Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," *NTS* 17.4 (1971): 480–87, at 482; idem, "Wrong Tool," 575.

147 Bloch, 121–22.

historians and critical investigators operate.¹⁴⁸ Beyond Langlois and Seignobos, historians from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries lived to see the linguistic turn and the postmodern critique of historiography shatter the positivism of their predecessors. While not caving to the more extreme postmodernist critiques, these later historians are noticeably more cautious in their pronouncements on what historiographic method can verify. The scholars reviewed above hail from different places and represent different epochs and eras of historiography, and yet they espouse several of the same procedures and criteria for assessing the verisimilitude of statements in historical documents. While there is no universally accepted method, no single way of doing historiography, there are clearly certain principles—or criteria, to use a term loaded with history (or baggage) in historical-Jesus study but one that is nevertheless native to discussions of general historiographic method—which historians routinely espouse and operate with. These criteria include multiple and independent attestation, general or historical coherence, embarrassment, and dissimilarity. Tosh, writing less than a decade ago, nicely summarizes the status of discussions on method:

Admittedly, the rules cannot be reduced to a formula, and the exact procedures vary according to the type of evidence; but much of what the experienced scholar does almost without thinking can be described in terms that are comprehensible to the uninitiated. When spelt out in this way, historical method may seem to amount to little more than the obvious lessons of common sense. But it is common sense applied very much more systematically and sceptically than is usually the case in everyday life, supported by a secure grasp of historical context and, in many instances, a high degree of technical knowledge. It is by these taxing standards that historical research demands to be judged.¹⁴⁹

Langlois and Seignobos, Tosh and Gaddis, and the historians between them envision not a clear-cut, step-by-step formula, but a general method guided by scientific principles of observation, hypothesis, and thought experiments which, ideally, will equip the historian to present a plausible account of past events. The method also involves the use of certain tools or criteria which assist historians in evaluating the veracity of statements in historical documents, not at all unlike how many historical Jesus scholars have historically conceived of the criteria. To these we will now turn.

¹⁴⁸ Tucker, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Tosh, 119.

4 A Synthetic Comparison of Criteria for Verification among Historical Jesus Scholars and General Historians

4.1 *Multiple Attestation*

The general historians reviewed above universally valued the multiple and independent attestation of particulars. According to these historians, multiple and independent attestation increases the probability that a statement is historically factual. In chapter 1 I highlighted historical Jesus scholars' paltry interaction with general historians; it worth noting that, despite some occasional reference to general historiography,¹⁵⁰ Jesus researchers and general historians have multiply and independently attested to the value of multiple and independent attestation. NT scholar Mark Goodacre observes the following:

When historians say that they prefer traditions that are attested in a variety of different sources, they are stating the obvious. As a general principle, no one seriously prefers ill-attested late traditions to well-attested early ones. When historical Jesus scholars appeal to the criterion of multiple attestation, they are, on one level, behaving as one would expect sane historians to behave. They are drawing attention to the best evidence, looking for multiple, early, independent attestation of traditions about Jesus with a view to setting up the bedrock for a strong reconstruction. In principle, the criterion of multiple attestation is simply a statement of sound historical method.¹⁵¹

With these words Goodacre opens his contribution to *JCDA*. Criticizing the criterion of multiple attestation—also the title of his essay—is a risky proposition if one does not carefully nuance precisely what about multiple attestation is being criticized. In his essay, Goodacre does not critique the criterion of multiple attestation, per se, so much as he critiques the dominant source-critical model for solving the Synoptic Problem: Goodacre rejects Q, and he therefore rejects the application of multiple attestation to a given gospel tradition in Mark and Q.¹⁵² Regardless, Goodacre unequivocally affirms the value of multiple and independent attestation in the statement above and elsewhere, where

150 Stanley E. Porter, "The Criteria of Authenticity," *HSHJ*, 2:695–714, at 700–05. See also Anthony R. Cross, "Historical Methodology and New Testament Study," *Them* 22.3 (1997): 28–51.

151 Mark Goodacre, "Criticizing the Criterion of Multiple Attestation: The Historical Jesus and the Question of Sources," in *JCDA*, 152–67, at 152.

152 Mark Goodacre, *The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002).

he promotes a specific application of multiple and independent attestation termed “view common to friend and foe alike.”¹⁵³ Goodacre’s comments represent how the overwhelming majority of NT scholars operate with this particular criterion. It is therefore undeniable that Jesus researchers and general historians alike find multiple and independent attestation valuable.

4.2 *Coherence*

As it appears in Jesus research, the criterion of coherence generally refers to the practice of attributing authenticity to a tradition if it coheres with traditions already deemed authentic (often by multiple attestation or dissimilarity with early Christianity). General historians tend to use coherence to refer to something akin to historical verisimilitude.¹⁵⁴ This use of coherence can be termed “general or historical coherence” since the coherence is not in matters of particulars but in generalities. For example, if a singularly attested tradition reports that person X did Y to person Z, this tradition, based on its singular attestation, fails the criterion of multiple attestation; if, however, external sources report that person X did Y to persons A, B, and C, then by way of general coherence the initial statement about X doing Y to person Z achieves a degree of verisimilitude: although the initial statement has not been corroborated in terms of particulars, it nonetheless enjoys a general corroboration or coherence. Naturally, the greater the coherence with what can be known about the subject or event from other sources, the greater will be the probability of historical authenticity. This quality of coherence espoused by general historians is rooted in the same rationale that NT scholars propose for the criterion of coherence: a tradition that coheres with what can be known of a subject’s behavior, character, customs, etc., has a greater likelihood of historical authenticity.

4.3 *Dissimilarity and Embarrassment*

Despite the difficulties many NT scholars have found with the application of *double* dissimilarity, the particular manifestation of dissimilarity from early Christianity is still largely considered valid (see the discussion in chapter 1

153 Goodacre, 153n.2. See also Goodacre’s podcast episode, “What Is the Criterion of ‘Views Common to Friend and Foe’?” Goodacre credits Sanders and Davies with this criterion (cf. Sanders and Davies, 300–33).

154 Cf. the discussion of verisimilitude in Craig A. Evans and Greg Monette, “Jesus’ Burial: Archaeology, Authenticity, and History,” in *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History: Criteria and Context in the Study of Christian Origins*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 269–84 (abbreviated hereafter as *JSPH*).

above). General historians describe an essentially similar criterion or principle, referring most often to that which runs counter to the expectations of the author or the audience (given that the implied audience is predominantly sympathetic to the author's aims). A reported fact that surprises an author or one he or she would not likely expect, in light of relevant socio-cultural and historical considerations, likely represents an authentic tradition. One particular expression of the principle of dissimilarity that is often treated as its own criterion (though combined here for the sake of brevity) is the criterion of embarrassment. Jesus researchers argue that certain traditions that cast Jesus or his disciples (or even later adherents to the Jesus movement) in a disadvantageous, embarrassing, or even shameful light were not likely invented by the early church. General historians, too, recognize the presence of materials that run counter to the author's expectations or that are potentially embarrassing to the protagonist and consider these traditions to be likely authentic as well.

Historians of Jesus and general historians who use these tools aim for them to serve as one component of an appropriately complex and sophisticated method; modern proponents of the criteria do not believe these tools to comprise the sum and substance of historiographic methodology. Methods necessarily involve processes with theoretical underpinnings as well as practical applications. Thus far I have reviewed the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of the criteria espoused by both historians of Jesus and general historians. Now we turn to the application of these criteria on two test cases where the historical sources differ in both major and minor respects. In chapter 3 I will analyze how representatives of the three categories of responses to the criteria from chapter 1 assess the authenticity of the canonical narratives of Jesus's trial. In chapter 4 I will examine how modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity assess the historical authenticity of traditions related to Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon. The results of chapters 3 and 4 are presented in a detailed, criterion-by-criterion analysis in the first half of chapter 5, followed by my final analysis of the arguments in favor and against the criteria.

Historical Jesus Scholars' Use of Authenticating Criteria

A Test Case on Jesus's Trial(s)

In chapters 1 and 2 I surveyed the work of Jesus researchers and general historians, respectively, to determine the broad contours of what each group generally believed about how they can assess the likelihood or unlikelihood of historical accuracy in statements from historical documents. Among historians of Jesus, I focused specifically on those scholars who have critically reviewed the criteria from the latter half of the twentieth century to the present, after the criteria had risen to prominence. Three broad responses thus emerged from these discussions: 1) those who are critical of but nevertheless largely accept and operate with the standard criteria of authenticity; 2) those who offer new criteria and/or operate with certain, thoroughly revised criteria; and 3) those who wish to see the criteria pushed to the extreme margins of historiographic methodology in Jesus research or those who reject them altogether. The nuance in the description of the first group must not be overlooked, for I do not wish to give the false impression that scholars in this group employ the criteria uncritically. As I repeatedly demonstrated these scholars consistently urged caution in applying certain criteria, they often did not accept all the variations of the standard criteria (e.g., *double dissimilarity*), and/or they found other criteria to be less than helpful. John Meier is representative of the first group: in general, he speaks highly of embarrassment, dissimilarity, multiple attestation, coherence, and the criterion of rejection and execution of Jesus, but he questions the value of traces of Aramaic, Palestinian environment, vividness of narration, tendencies of the developing tradition, and historical presumption.¹ Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter are representative of the second group. Their criterion of historical plausibility (CHP) is an innovative criterion but inherent to it are the principles of multiple attestation, general or historical coherence, dissimilarity, and embarrassment.² Dale Allison and Jens Schröter, from the third group, typify the calls to marginalize or reject the criteria.

1 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*. 1:167–84. Meier tends to speak of “discontinuity,” which, in his discussion, is synonymous with dissimilarity (1:171–74).

2 General or historical coherence among Jesus researchers can include more specific criteria such as Palestinian environment (cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*

Proponents of using the criteria for Jesus research, those offering new or revised criteria, and even opponents of the criteria approach all speak of the "criteria of authenticity."³ Despite their complexity in application and rationale or their variations in nomenclature, when one speaks of the "criteria of authenticity" within the context of Jesus research, a relatively clear approach with fairly distinct tools comes to mind. On the other hand, no such common expression exists for general historians; there seems to be no comparable shorthand like "criteria of authenticity" in use among general historians to refer to a fairly distinct collection of tools for assessing the historicity of a given datum. Stanley Porter remarks on this in his chapter on the criteria in *HSHJ*, and this lack of direct mention of "criteria of authenticity" by general historians makes the criteria approach seem all the more suspect to Porter.⁴ "Authenticity" as general historians use the term refers not to matters of historicity but to the genuineness of authorial ascription;⁵ for general historians an

[Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 157–58), but not every historian of Jesus finds Palestinian environment especially useful (cf. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:180, who finds the negative use of this criterion more valuable).

- 3 See, e.g., the following: Craig A. Evans, "Authenticity Criteria in the Life of Jesus Research," *CSR* 19 (1989): 6–31; Tom Holmén, "Authenticity Criteria," *EHJ*, 44–54; Stanley E. Porter, "The Criteria of Authenticity," *HSHJ*, 695–714.
- 4 Cf. Porter, "Criteria of Authenticity," *HSHJ*, 700–05. Porter mentions four specific instances where modern historians, in their treatments of Jesus, do not refer to the criteria of authenticity. Michael Grant, one of historians Porter reviews, does, however, refer to "criteria" in order to describe the tools he will use for his reconstruction (Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* [New York: Scribners, 1995], 201). Grant's ensuing discussion contains a brief, critical review of the major criteria where he remarks on their relative value. See the analysis of Grant's methodological discussion in the excursus at the end of chapter 3 below.
- 5 For this use of "authentic," see the following: Charles Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. George Godfrey Berry (London: Duckworth, 1912), 159; Gilbert J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method*, ed. Jean Delanglez (New York: Fordham University Press, 1946), 168–204; Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 118–38; Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 43, 57–60; John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 102–04. Garraghan, under a section titled "Criteria of Authenticity," states "Criteria for determining the authenticity of documents fall into two main groups, external and internal" (174). Immediately below begins a subsection on External Criteria, and within the first point he states "As a rule, a work should be attributed to the author whose name appears in the title, subscription, or other similar part of genuine early copies of the work in question" (174); in this case, then, a source is "authentic." Howell and Prevenier state, "Historians need to distinguish between those sources that are false in the sense that they are not genuine and those that are false in the sense that they contain inaccurate information. In the first case, the question is whether

“authentic” source actually comes from the person named as author or originator. This is likely the reason why general historians do not tend to talk of “criteria of authenticity,” because for them “authenticity” means something other than what it means within Jesus research. Although general historians do not refer to “criteria of authenticity,” essentially similar principles and procedures for evaluating the historical accuracy of claims in historical documents are indeed employed by general historians.

Some historians of Jesus argue that using the criteria aligns their methods with the methods of general historians (see chapter 1 above). However, the criteria proponents’ somewhat paltry interaction with the methods of general historians makes this claim questionable at best, dubious at worst. Do scholars of the historical Jesus and general historians actually use similar methods, methods that would be recognizable to those in the other discipline? In the surveys from chapters 1 and 2, I uncovered several similarities in the historiographic *theory* of Jesus researchers and general historians—i.e., both groups describe (at least) four common principles for assessing the historicity or authenticity of statements in historical documents: multiple attestation, general or historical coherence, dissimilarity, and embarrassment to a lesser degree. But does this theory hold in *practice*? To determine this, we must examine the application of these methods with particular test cases from Jesus researchers and general historians.

The trials of Jesus before the Jerusalem aristocracy and Pilate will serve as my test case for examining how historians of Jesus use the criteria of authenticity. Since the accounts of the trials in the canonical Gospels differ in certain respects, critics have frequently sought to determine what is the historical core of the trial narratives.⁶ I have arranged the following analysis of the use of the criteria on the trial narratives in accordance with the schema developed in chapter 1. Since the primary focus of this study is methodological and, more

the documents do in fact originate as they claim. ... If so, historians consider them *authentic* or *genuine*” (57, my emphasis). And, only a few years ago, Tosh speaks of authenticity in precisely the same way as his predecessors. His chapter titled “Using the Sources” (98–121) includes a section titled “Is it authentic?” Tosh begins with this statement: “The first step in evaluating a document is to test its *authenticity*; this is sometimes known as *external* criticism. Are the author, the place, and the date of writing what they purport to be?” (102, my emphasis).

- 6 Despite their age, the bibliographies in the following chapters are heartily recommended: Darrell L. Bock, “Blasphemy and the Jewish Examination of Jesus,” in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, WUNT 1/247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 589–667; Robert L. Webb, “The Roman Examination and Crucifixion of Jesus: Their Historicity and Implications,” in Bock and Webb, 669–773.

narrowly, criteriological, it will not be necessary to review every component of the authors' historiographic reconstructions of Jesus's trial, for the scholars reviewed below do not (and cannot) rely on the criteria of authenticity *as the sole basis* of their reconstructions.

1 The Trial(s) of Jesus in the "Critical but Accepting" Category

1.1 *Raymond E. Brown*

In the introduction to his extraordinary commentary on the Passion narratives Raymond Brown critically assesses the various tools historians have developed for determining what originates with Jesus and what originates in later Christian preaching and teaching in Jesus's name. His general assessment is that "[s]ome of these criteria are of use in studying the passion, provided we keep carefully in mind their limitations."⁷ Coincidentally, Brown proceeds to discuss the four criteria that have repeatedly emerged in this study: multiple attestation, coherence, embarrassment, and dissimilarity.⁸

Although Brown admits multiple attestation is "[t]he criterion I shall invoke most frequently," he recognizes its application is necessarily dependent upon the scholar's understanding of the Synoptics' and John's relationship. Operating from the stance that the Synoptics and John are independent witnesses, Brown acknowledges that scholars who affirm John's dependence on Mark will inevitably disagree with his conclusions.⁹

An event that is not multiply attested and yet coheres with another tradition that does enjoy multiple attestation can be considered historical, but this must "be used with extreme care since coherence could explain why the incident was imaginatively created."¹⁰ For example, the tradition that Peter struck the ear of the high priest's servant coheres with Peter's penchant for brash speech and action, but Brown believes that, in light of Peter's reputation, his name could just as easily have been attached to this action after the fact. More firmly, however, is the Gospels' and Acts's indication that some perceived Jesus to have a threatening attitude toward the temple: this "is coherent with solid

7 Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Gospels*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 17. Clearly, Brown's caution is typical of many historical Jesus scholars who employ the criteria.

8 Brown, 17–19.

9 Brown, 17–18.

10 Brown, 18.

historical evidence that in the period before 70 CE disputes over the Temple constituted the most frequent single factor in religious violence among Jews.”¹¹

An embarrassing tradition is not likely a creation of the early Christians, but Brown recognizes the potential that “one must always allow that it could have been useful to develop [an embarrassing tradition] ... as a theological illustration.”¹² Regarding dissimilarity, Brown states emphatically “This is a criterion I hesitate to invoke since one must allow for creativity,” noting further how it is not applicable to the overwhelming majority of traditions and that its application tends to distort the results of the historical study of Jesus.¹³ To summarize: Brown urges caution in the use of the criteria but nevertheless finds them helpful. These comments place Brown squarely within the “Critical but Accepting” category.

Although Brown affirms “one can characterize as bedrock history that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified at Jerusalem at the end of the first third of the 1st cent. AD when Pontius Pilate was governor,” he cautions his readers that the main purpose for the evangelists’ compositions was not to present biographical information about Jesus but rather to “communicate to their audiences an interpretation of Jesus that would nourish faith and life.”¹⁴ History, by way of implication, is not merely reported, it is also interpreted. In the death, burial, resurrection and subsequent appearances of Jesus, Paul acknowledges his reception of both scripturally-interpreted history (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–5, where specifically Jesus’s death and resurrection are said to have occurred “according to the Scriptures”) as well as historical events that gave rise to no apparent additional scriptural reflection (at least by Paul’s time). If, then, history and story are clearly combined in the Gospels (especially in the Passion narratives), according to Brown it is appropriate to investigate historical matters in the Gospels with sensitivity to their theological reflections and narrative presentations.

Turning to the events in the trial before the Jerusalem aristocracy, Brown notes the multiply attested tradition of Jesus’s nighttime arrest and transfer to the high priest’s courtyard. He accepts that “[p]robably the tradition of ‘the night in which he was given over’ (1 Cor 11:23) was so strong as to leave little

11 Brown, 18.

12 Brown, 18. Brown astutely observes “Determining what was embarrassing in the [passion narratives] becomes less subjective if we begin with items fastened on by Jewish or pagan polemic against the plausibility of Christianity. The flight of the disciples, denials by Peter, betrayal by Judas, and Jesus’ prayer for deliverance were all objects of scorn in such polemic” (18n.25).

13 Brown, 19.

14 Brown, 13.

choice" but to include it.¹⁵ Following Jesus's nighttime arrest comes Peter's three denials of Jesus that all four Gospels place on the same night. Although the sequence of the ensuing events is not the same in each Gospel, several events are multiply attested: a Sanhedrin session to deal with Jesus; the mention of the threat Jesus posed to the Temple; the high priest urging for Jesus's death; judgment amounting to a death sentence; and an investigation on the night of Jesus's arrest.¹⁶

Turning to the historicity of Jesus's sanctuary statement, Brown first cites Jesus's multiply attested action of disrupting commerce in the temple precincts.¹⁷ He further argues that Mark and Luke (in material unique to Luke) both present Jesus's cumulative frustration with the temple. Additionally, Brown cites an argument from Theissen who believes Jesus's "general attitude is perfectly plausible in the history of the time."¹⁸ This multiple attestation from Mark and Luke, coupled with the general and historical coherence of Jesus's attitude within the first half of the first century CE, lends verisimilitude to the Gospels' presentation. Furthermore, on the basis of embarrassment, Brown argues that "it is hard to think that Christians invented a prediction involving Jesus in the destruction and rebuilding of the sanctuary when he was dead and the Temple was still standing untouched. The different wordings that have been preserved [in the Gospels] ... are more likely Christian attempts at reformulating a difficult dominical saying than free creations."¹⁹ For these reasons (and others which I have omitted since my focus is application of the criteria) Brown concludes that there is a very high probability that Jesus spoke about the impending destruction and rebuilding of the temple, noting that "the agreement of John, Mark/Matt, and Acts in different ways that the Temple or holy place or sanctuary issue aroused lethal priestly hostility toward Jesus has plausibility indeed,"²⁰ but that the Gospels are split regarding whether the Sanhedrin cited this reason or not.²¹ He thus argues that some statement or action foretelling the temple's destruction and Jesus's association with such a statement or action "has high historical probability."²²

15 Brown, 417.

16 Brown, 425.

17 Brown, 455.

18 Brown, 456, citing Gerd Theissen, "Die Tempelweissagung Jesu: Prophetie im Spannungsfeld von Stadt und Land," *TZ* 32.3 (1976): 144–58, at 146–47.

19 Brown, 457.

20 Brown, 458–59.

21 John and Luke omit the saying, but Mark/Matt include it; cf. Brown, 459.

22 Brown, 459–60.

Turning to the accusation in Jesus's trial, Brown wonders whether Jesus was called the Messiah and whether he accepted such a title.²³ In his analysis Brown notes that, despite slightly different wording on the titulus, "all [the Gospels] have the four Greek words for 'The King of the Jews.'"²⁴ Based on this multiple attestation, and the dissimilarity of the title "King of the Jews" from early Christianity, Brown concludes there is a "high probability" that Jesus was crucified on this charge.²⁵ Along these lines it is "very likely" that "Jesus's opponents (Roman or Jewish) interpreted (honestly or dishonestly) him or his followers as making the claim that he was the Messiah, and that contributed to the charge on which the Romans crucified him."²⁶ Implicitly employing multiple attestation, Brown astutely remarks that throughout all four Gospels certain Jewish persons are presented as wanting to know if Jesus thought he was the Messiah and that the Romans wanted to know if Jesus thought he was King of the Jews.²⁷ Again, on multiple attestation, Brown believes it is very likely Jesus's disciples claimed or confessed Jesus as the Messiah during his lifetime.²⁸

On the charge of blasphemy, Brown painstakingly details the issues involved in assessing each component of the charges. On the basis of historical coherence, Brown argues that crucifixion would have been viewed as a legitimate punishment for blasphemy, in addition to stoning (cf. Stephen in Acts 7:58–59).²⁹ However, neither Jesus's claims to be the Messiah or the Son of God were likely considered blasphemy; the claim to be the Son of Man, depending on how the audience understood such a designation, could have *possibly* been considered blasphemous. More significantly, on the basis of historical coherence Jesus's perceived threat against the temple "may very well have been among the religious legal reasons offered" for Jesus's execution, "but *none of the parallels ... states that blasphemy was involved.*"³⁰ Arguing on the basis of what is essentially recurrent attestation (without naming it as such), if the Gospels' consistent portrayal of Jesus's taking the prerogative of God is accurate, then Brown sees "little reason to doubt that his opponents would

23 Brown, 475.

24 Brown, 476.

25 Brown, 476.

26 Brown, 478.

27 Brown, 478.

28 Brown, 478. Brown finds the application of "Son of God" to Jesus much less likely. Cf. 480–83 for his analysis.

29 Brown, 532–34. Brown does not argue either/or for stoning or crucifixion for blasphemy; instead, he argues both/and, i.e., that in the first century both stoning or crucifixion were viewed as valid means of execution for the sin of blasphemy.

30 Brown, 541 (original emphasis). Cf. 538–41 for Brown's argument and comparison with other second temple literature.

have considered him blasphemous ..., even as the Gospels report at the trial.”³¹ For Brown, then, the effect is cumulative, so that not one single event or statement but the general tenor of Jesus's teaching and ministry (including his temple action/cleansing) led the Jewish leadership to the charge of blasphemy.

Several examples from Greco-Roman and Jewish literature indicate that, on occasion, governing authorities released prisoners at special times,³² and for this reason Brown believes Pilate's release of Barabbas coheres to some degree with what some rulers did. On the other hand, “the conclusion from this discussion of Roman and Jewish amnesty/pardon parallels is that *there is no good analogy supporting the historical likelihood of the custom in Judea of regularly releasing a prisoner at a/the feast (of Passover) as described in three Gospels.*”³³ Brown therefore maintains that while the person Barabbas was historical due to his multiple attestation in the Gospels, the custom of a Paschal prisoner release was a secondary development; Barabbas may have been released at another time and only later connected to Jesus before the composition of the Gospels.³⁴

According to Brown's analysis, relatively little in the Passion narratives can be said to be certainly historical, but this conclusion should surprise no Jesus researcher. Taken as historical bedrock is Jesus's crucifixion under Pontius Pilate (see above), but the historicity of numerous other Passion traditions is less certain. At one point Brown admits, “Though in this scene [of the Sanhedrin proceedings] Mark used earlier material, whether traditions or consecutive narrative, *our best methods do not give us the ability to isolate confidently that material in its exact wording, assigning preMarcan verses and half-verses from the existing, thoroughly Marcan account*”;³⁵ these sentiments largely represent Brown's stance on the criteria, namely that they are valuable to an extent. Despite this evaluation, using the criteria of authenticity as one component of a more complex historiographic process Brown has argued frequently that particular traditions may enjoy verisimilitude (usually due to their coherence with what can be known about a particular figure or certain custom) or that some traditions are more or less plausible or likely given their multiple attestation or, less frequently applied, their embarrassing nature or dissimilarity to Christianity.

31 Brown, 547. Cf. 544–47 for the full argument.

32 Cf. the discussion in Brown, 814–19.

33 Brown, 818 (my emphasis).

34 Cf. Brown, 859.

35 Brown, 554.

1.2 *John Dominic Crossan*

Crossan's most detailed treatments of the historical Jesus begin with his monograph on the origins of the passion narratives.³⁶ He argues that the (hypothetical) *Cross Gospel* serves as the original stratum for the *Gospel of Peter*, which in turn forms much of the basis for the canonical Gospels' passion narratives.³⁷ This is a foundational point to Crossan's argument that seriously affects Crossan's historiographic reconstructions or, more accurately, the paucity thereof. As Crossan maintains, the Passion narratives in general and the trial narratives in particular are not so much history remembered as prophecy historicized;³⁸ there is, consequently, too little material available to offer a thorough historical reconstruction. Because Crossan believes "the *Cross Gospel*," on which the canonical Gospels are based, "is serenely ignorant of historical plausibility,"³⁹ the canonical Gospels work with little actual historical memory.

There are, however, a few instances in *The Cross That Spoke* in which Crossan engages in historiographic reconstruction or, if not reconstruction, then at the very least, investigation. Referring to the trials, Crossan doubts their historicity and follows John R. Donahue who believes Mark has created the initial questioning before the Jewish leadership, arguing that "Mark's juxtaposition of the witness of Jesus in 14:64 with the denial of Peter in 14:66–72 is a graphic demonstration of the twin options confronting persecuted Christians."⁴⁰ This argument, which Crossan cites approvingly, relies on the negative use of the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity.

When Crossan considers the different portrayals of Pilate in Philo, Josephus, and the canonical Gospels, he states "Everything that we know of Pilate from outside the New Testament indicates both a lack of respect for Jewish religious feelings and a ready resort to brutal force when that lack resulted in trouble."⁴¹ Crossan believes these mutually corroborating descriptions of

36 John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

37 Cf. the discussion in Crossan, *Cross*, 3–30, and *passim*. Pace Crossan, see the argument by Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, "Assessing the Criteria for Differentiating the Cross Gospel," in *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 172–84.

38 Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1994), 152; and *idem*, *Who Killed Jesus?: Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1995), 117.

39 Crossan, *Cross*, 54.

40 Crossan, *Cross*, 45, citing John R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), 239.

41 Crossan, *Cross*, 34.

Pilate's character in Philo and Josephus present what is essentially the historical Pilate. According to Crossan, "One must question, therefore, the historical accuracy of both the paschal amnesty and the compliant Pilate of the intracanonical passion accounts."⁴² The canonical Gospels mainly "are dealing with a problem not in historical recall but in narrative plausibility."⁴³ Crossan's relatively little discussion of historicity is quite natural, then, given his stance: "My basic hypothesis is that the followers of Jesus knew that he had been crucified through some collaboration of sacerdotal aristocracy and imperial power but knew almost nothing about the details of his death, let alone those of his trial, if indeed any trial took place."⁴⁴ The trial traditions are, according to Crossan, primarily "meditation upon passion prophecy,"⁴⁵ not historical information about the details of Jesus's sentence. These statements encapsulate Crossan's perspective on the trial. Because Crossan sees so little of historical value in the Gospels, there is little reason for him to employ historiographic criteria. When he does, however, he employs them to essentially the same effect as the other scholars reviewed throughout this chapter.

Methodology is by no means unimportant to Crossan, however, and he therefore rightly begins his most comprehensive study of the historical Jesus by wanting "to raise most seriously the problem of methodology and then follow most stringently whatever theoretical method was chosen." His method is akin to a literary excavation, where he aims to employ consistently a "scientific stratigraphy" to the gospel traditions. In what he terms a "triple triadic process," the first triad comprises anthropological, historical, and literary investigations.⁴⁶ A further remark on this approach yields a brief mention of the criterion of multiple attestation: "both anthropological and historical levels demand an equal sophistication on the literary or textual level, an acute sensitivity to the chronology of stratification, the *multiplicity of attestation*, and the interweaving of retention, mutation, and creation within the Jesus tradition itself."⁴⁷ For Crossan, "the Gospels are neither histories nor biographies, even within the ancient tolerances for those genres."⁴⁸ Instead, the traditions contained

42 Crossan, *Cross*, 90.

43 Crossan, *Cross*, 91.

44 Crossan, *Cross*, 111. For an opposing view, see Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, AGJU 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 433n.73.

45 Crossan, *Cross*, 111.

46 Each of the preceding quotations can be found in the introduction to John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), xxviii.

47 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, xxix (my emphasis).

48 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, xxx.

in the Gospels consist of three distinct layers: what was retained, what was developed, and what was created. Crossan's second triad deals with these textual issues. First, he inventories the earliest layers of intra- and extracanonical traditions; next, he must stratify each text or source in a chronological order; and finally he examines "that now stratified data base in terms of *multiplicity of independent attestation* for each complex of the Jesus tradition."⁴⁹ The key here is *independent* attestation, for a tradition occurring in all four Gospels may derive from two sources (Mark and John) or only one (Mark). The third triad builds on the results of the second: first, Crossan sequences the various strata beginning with the material chronologically closest to Jesus (four total strata); second, he presents a counting (or hierarchy) of attestation within the first stratum; and third, Crossan disregards (or brackets) singularly attested traditions.⁵⁰ Due to the predominance of the criterion of multiple attestation, as well as the occasional employment of dissimilarity and embarrassment, this places Crossan within the "Critical but Accepting" category of scholars.⁵¹

In *Historical Jesus*, Crossan refers readers to his discussion about the trial narratives in his earlier *The Cross That Spoke*, where Crossan's remarks on Jesus's execution at Pilate's behest display his use of the criteria quite clearly (see above). Beginning a subsection titled "Under Pontius Pilate," Crossan states emphatically "I take it absolutely for granted that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Security about the *fact* of the crucifixion derives not only from the unlikelihood that Christians would have invented it but also from the existence of two early and independent non-Christian witnesses to it."⁵² In this opening sentence Crossan has applied both the criterion of embarrassment and the criterion of multiple and independent attestation. After a detailed treatment of the Christian interpolations in Josephus and a few remarks about Tacitus, Crossan reiterates once again the fact of Pilate's crucifixion of Jesus.⁵³

49 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, xxxi (my emphasis).

50 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, xxxiii. Although he agrees "that, in theory, a unit found only in a single source from the third stratum might be just as original as one found in fivefold independent attestation from the first stratum" (xxxiii).

51 Cf. the description of Crossan's method, specifically his application of multiple attestation, in Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 158–59.

52 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 372 (original emphasis).

53 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 375, although his main goal is to analyze the interplay of history and prophecy in the passion narratives. Cf. 375–94, especially 387. In Crossan's *Revolutionary Biography*, he largely reiterates his argument about Pilate although he treats Josephus's account more critically here than in *The Cross that Spoke* (cf. *Revolutionary Biography*, 139). Crossan summarizes: "My best historical reconstruction of what actually happened is that Jesus was arrested during the Passover festival and those closest

Crossan's literary-archaeological approach is innovative if not also highly idiosyncratic. He doubts the historicity of the trial of Jesus before the high priest. Within his own schema he applies the criteria of authenticity less frequently but to the same effect as Brown. That said, the differences in Crossan's and Brown's presentations are not the fault of the criteria; the differences arise from vastly different presuppositions about the origin of the traditions of Jesus's trial.

1.3 Craig S. Keener

Craig Keener has most recently remarked on the criteria of authenticity in his 2019 monograph on the Gospels and their ancient, literary milieu. Having observed the (relatively) recent calls for abandoning the criteria by those who champion a social memory approach, Keener believes "that dismissing the criteria rather than merely using them circumspectly is an overreaction."⁵⁴ The point of his *Christobiography*, however, is not to engage in the kind of historiographic reconstruction of Jesus's life and times like what he published over a decade ago,⁵⁵ and for that reason Keener says little more about the criteria in *Christobiography*.⁵⁶ Keener's comments are cited above to show, however, that his position on the criteria has not changed significantly when he more directly discussed matters of the Gospels' historicity.

to him fled for their own safety. ... The details in our gospels are, in any case, *prophecy historicized* and not *history memorized*" (152, original emphasis). These sentiments are echoed in Crossan's *Who Killed Jesus?*, a response to Brown's *Death of the Messiah*. Noting that Brown appreciates the narrative artistry of the passion narratives, Crossan complains "[Brown] always presumes that such artistry ... is but an expansion or rearrangement of received traditions based on a fairly detailed core of memory. For me, the received tradition is not a core of memory recalling what happened to Jesus under trial but a core of prophecy replacing memory's absence. ... In summary ... the Trial is, in my best judgment, based entirely on prophecy historicized rather than history remembered. It is not just the *content* of the trial(s) but the very *fact* of the trial(s) that I consider to be unhistorical" (117, original emphasis).

54 Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 451.

55 Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

56 Keener, *Christobiography*, states "But while I affirm that most of those criteria can remain valuable (and have applied them in some earlier works), they are already too well-known for rehearsal in this book, and their application would prove more relevant for an actual reconstruction of the historical Jesus than for a prolegomenon of this sort," (451). Although Keener does not discuss the modern criteria to the extent he does elsewhere (cf. Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 155–59), he has much more to say about the critical criteria ancient historians employed in *Christobiography*, 216–19.

In his *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, Keener finds the criteria to be generally valuable, though some are more useful than others.⁵⁷ After briefly treating the benefits and drawbacks of form criticism, which popularized many of the criteria, Keener discusses six specific criteria: multiple attestation and coherence; dissimilarity (uniqueness) and embarrassment; Palestinian environment; and Aramaisms.⁵⁸ For Keener, multiple attestation and coherence are essentially similar for they both seek corroboration in differing degrees. Keener affirms the positive use of multiple attestation, i.e. to support a tradition's likelihood, but he rejects its negative use to rule out a tradition.⁵⁹ The criterion of coherence seeks "whether the sayings in question fit with other sayings or behavior that we regard as authentic."⁶⁰ The review of general historiographic method in chapter 2 made clear that the prevailing interest of general historians was and is *events* that could (or could not) be established as historical—of course, within varying degrees of probability—rather than sayings. Form criticism, on the other hand, originally developed to understand the *Sitz im Leben* of *sayings* attributed to Jesus; naturally, then, form critics came to employ their criteria on sayings traditions. Although Keener primarily discusses these two criteria in terms of their application to sayings, he rightly includes interest in the subject's behavior in his discussion of coherence. The principles of multiple and independent attestation and coherence feature prominently in general historiography, where there is less concern with sayings of a given figure and more with their actions and the events of their time, and Keener's position on and use of these criteria (see below) aligns with general historians' comments in chapter 2.

For Keener, only the positive application of dissimilarity is useful, and the criterion of embarrassment can be helpful as well.⁶¹ Since dissimilarity has fallen on hard times, Keener observes how "A sort of 'similarity' criterion is thus more in vogue today: whatever situates Jesus in the continuum between

57 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 155. The analysis below derives almost completely from *Historical Jesus*. This is not to neglect Keener's historical-critical and exegetical analysis of Matthew's arrest and trial, but much of what Keener says in his *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 644–73, he covers in *Historical Jesus*.

58 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 155–59.

59 Here Keener refers to John's hyperbolic statement to indicate—rightly—that "in fact, we can be quite sure that most things Jesus said during his lifetime are attested *nowhere* in our tradition. Apparently enough traditions remained by the late first century that we cannot expect any Gospel writer to feel obligated to include them all (cf. John 20:30; 21:25)" (*Historical Jesus*, 155).

60 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 155.

61 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 156–57.

contemporary Judaism and the movement that emerged from him offers the likeliest portrait of Jesus.”⁶² This “similarity” criterion is what Keener terms Palestinian Environment. Scholars should recognize that traditions clearly reflecting a Palestinian Jewish milieu most obviously originate in Jewish Palestine; this need not be taken as originating with Jesus, “but they do take us back to the earliest circle of witnesses for Jesus, greatly increasing the probability the saying is authentic.”⁶³ On Aramaisms in the text, Keener says “Some might therefore charge that the earliest Christians could have invented sayings attributed to Jesus in this period. But given all we know of Jewish and (for that matter) Greco-Roman traditioning and growth of legends, this would be the *least* likely period in which sayings or stories would be invented.”⁶⁴ Aramaic features only *suggest* an origin within the earliest community of Jesus’s followers; good Greek, however, should not count against a tradition’s authenticity since most Palestinian Jews were probably bilingual.⁶⁵ Based on these comments, Keener fits comfortably in the “Critical but Accepting” group of scholars who view the criteria as generally useful when applied correctly.

In *Historical Jesus*, Keener uses the canonical Gospels to present a summary of what can be known about Jesus from the most reliable sources.⁶⁶ Noting the special issues with John and that he has commented on them elsewhere, Keener draws primarily on the Synoptics to show “that our sources frequently fit Jesus’s context and the most plausible historical reconstructions of Jesus’s ministry and plan.”⁶⁷ For our purposes of reviewing historical Jesus scholars’ use of the criteria, after I review Keener’s discussion in *Historical Jesus* I will examine the relevant portions of his commentary on John.

62 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 157. Cf. the criterion of historical plausibility in Theissen and Winter, *Plausible Jesus*.

63 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 157. If, as Holmén argues, embarrassment is a form of dissimilarity, then by way of analogy Palestinian environment could be considered a form of general or historical coherence: when a gospel tradition pertaining to geography or topography, or a ritual, custom, or other cultural feature coheres with what can be known of the land’s physical or cultural features from another source, that gospel tradition has a claim to authenticity, i.e. historicity; the Palestinian environment criterion Keener discusses is essentially the coherence criterion of general historians (see chapter 2).

64 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 159.

65 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 159.

66 For Keener’s views on why the canonical Gospels are the best sources, see *Historical Jesus*, 71–161.

67 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, xxxiv. For his comments on John, cf. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003). Keener also mentions that the Synoptics provide enough information about Jesus for Keener to make his larger point.

In his opening remarks on Jesus's arrest and execution, Keener asserts "No one doubts that Jesus was executed. Early Christians would not have invented this fate for their leader, a fate that posed considerable risk for them as followers."⁶⁸ In other words, the "considerable risk" would have run counter to their interests, namely life and physical safety but also the acceptability of their message; according to the criterion of embarrassment, which Keener has not named but clearly employs, early Christians did not invent the Roman execution of Jesus. Later, in a discussion of the Gospels' genre, Keener states that "early Christians had every reason to avoid fabricating a story that would bring them into repeated conflict with Roman authorities and their own Jewish elite."⁶⁹ Additionally, the Gospels are not the only sources that report Jesus's execution: Keener thus appeals to Josephus's and Tacitus's accounts and, on the basis of this multiple and independent attestation, it is historically certain that Jesus was executed.⁷⁰

Comparison with certain statements from Paul provides additional independent attestation for a basic outline of the passion story. Paul's comments in 1 Cor 11 and 15 refer to Jesus's last meal and his betrayal, and to additional elements of Jesus's death and resurrection (respectively). Regarding this early and multiple attestation, Keener observes "Thus Paul has a passion sequence similar to Mark's (1 Cor 11:23–25; 15:3–5), and if, as is probable, John represents an independent tradition, it is significant that his passion narrative again confirms the outline that Mark follows, conceivably supporting a pre-Markan passion narrative."⁷¹ Enough common elements in similar sequence thus arise from three independently attested traditions (Paul, Mark, and John) with the result that the following outline becomes evident: Jesus dines with his disciples, a betrayal leads to his arrest, he is tried and executed, and his followers report seeing him alive and interacting with him days later.

Commenting on the general reliability of the passion narratives, Keener points to the inclusion of certain place names in the tradition. These locations would have been largely unknown outside of Palestine and, therefore, the associations of these places with certain people are likely not inventions. Although not strictly employing one of the criteria of authenticity, Keener holds that because there is no clear reason to fabricate these traditions, there may be historical information therein. This line of argumentation is strikingly similar to a discussion about the falsification of facts in Langlois and Seignobos, who

68 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 303.

69 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 305.

70 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 303–04.

71 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 306.

suggested that a source was unlikely to falsify a fact if there were no discernible gain or reason to invent such a fact or tradition.⁷²

Keener finds further substantial historical information in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus's execution because "it fits what we know of the period in question."⁷³ As he will do throughout his discussion, he operates here with the criterion of coherence by appealing to what can be known about certain persons and their behavior from other sources to corroborate what the Gospels report. Along these lines, Keener argues the Gospels' complaints about the chief priests' corruption are not anti-Jewish because a majority of ancient Jewish sources cite similar complaints. Josephus and evidence from Qumran frequently depict the chief priests compromising their scruples to cooperate with Rome. Keener summarizes: "The sum total of our extant sources suggests that corruption and exploitation pervaded Jerusalem's elite no less than that of other elites in antiquity."⁷⁴

Information about the makeup of the priesthood in Jesus's time also coheres with what can be known from other sources, including Annas's somewhat surprising presence in John's account. Although Annas had not been the chief priest since 15 CE, "it is likely that he continued to exert power within his household (especially if they privately recognized the biblical tradition concerning the lifelong character of a high priest's calling), including through his son-in-law Caiaphas, until his death in 35 CE."⁷⁵

Matthew's and Mark's initial "trial" was more likely a preliminary inquiry, according to Keener, before a formal trial was convened in the morning. Keener highlights the multiple attestation between the Synoptics and John that place Jesus first in the house of the high priest, and, by way of coherence with what can be known from Josephus, Keener argues such informal trials could be adequate for some high priests who would then recommend their decision to the Roman governor.⁷⁶ Referring specifically to the introduction of false witnesses against Jesus, Keener maintains that "If the Gospels imply that the aristocratic priests did not observe the highest standards in legal ethics, they do not here contradict other early Jewish reports about many of the chief priests ... and Josephus, a contemporary source who sometimes defends the high priests, is our most eloquent witness to the corruption that their power

72 Langlois and Seignobos, 187.

73 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 307.

74 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 311.

75 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 313. Following this, Keener reiterates his arguments against using Mishnaic evidence (313–14).

76 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 314.

bred.”⁷⁷ One final comment on the Jewish trial relates to the presence of Joseph of Arimathea: given the multiply attested tradition of Joseph of Arimathea’s discipleship (Matt 27:57; John 19:38), it is not implausible that later testimony from members of the council such as Joseph or another source within the high priest’s house could inform the Gospels’ depiction of Jesus’s Jewish trial.⁷⁸

Given the practice that only a Roman governor could have a provincial executed, Keener argues it is highly unlikely that early Christians invented Jesus’s appearance before Pilate. Furthermore, “that Jesus was crucified by the Romans is likewise inevitably historical; Christians would hardly have invented execution at all, but certainly not *Roman* execution, that would have painted them thereafter as subversives in the Roman world.”⁷⁹ The criterion of embarrassment is clearly in use here. Some have questioned Pilate’s hesitation to execute Jesus, and Keener admits the Gospels have an apologetic reason to deflect at least some responsibility from Pilate. But other sources mention the anti-Jewishness of Pilate’s patron Sejanus as well as Pilate’s own penchant for extraordinarily harsh treatment of locals. Taken together, Keener believes these sources strongly suggest that Pilate’s position as governor was not totally secure in the early 30s—indeed, Pilate was later removed from office only a few years after Jesus’s execution in 36 CE. Pilate may have, therefore, found it politically advantageous to be occasionally cooperative with the local aristocracy.

Keener finds a comparable degree of historical information in John’s account as he did in the Synoptics.⁸⁰ Beginning with Jesus’s appearance before Annas and Caiaphas (John 18:13, 24), Keener argues “Mark confirms that John follows historical tradition in linking an interrogation [of Jesus] by the Jerusalem elite with the time of Peter’s betrayal.”⁸¹ In finding and arguing from common tradition from Mark and John, Keener implicitly applies the criterion of multiple attestation. As was clear in the review above, the criterion of coherence undergirds much of Keener’s reconstructions, and, without being named, it repeatedly emerges in Keener’s historical-critical exegesis of the Johannine trial. Regarding the violation of legal procedures, Keener recognizes

77 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 315.

78 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 316.

79 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 318.

80 This is by no means to say that Keener is unaware of some of the historiographic difficulties one faces in trying to square certain details in the Synoptics and John. Two representative examples include: 1) John’s temple cleansing, where Keener argues it is unlikely Jesus cleansed the temple twice and that John has adjusted the (in)famous incident to make a theological point (*John*, 518); and 2) John’s Passover chronology, placing Jesus’s execution on a different day than the Synoptics, which Keener sees as John’s own emphasis (*John*, 1100–03).

81 Keener, *John*, 1084.

that many argue against the trial narrative as presented but he counters by citing rabbinic sources that indicate the priests did not always follow their own rules.⁸² Further, Matthew's and Mark's trial accounts may represent a preliminary inquiry (see above), in which case the rules were even less likely to be applied. Here Keener remarks, "At this point John's account is actually easier to envision historically without corroborative evidence than Mark's."⁸³ John presents Annas and Caiaphas privately questioning Jesus, and the Synoptics present Jesus initially in the chief priest's house. Taken with general evidence from Josephus, Keener suggests these informal hearings were occasionally sufficient.⁸⁴ Regarding Jesus's appearance before Annas along with Caiaphas, Keener believes many Jews may have still expected Annas to serve a key role in deciding important matters even though he was deposed as high priest by the Romans in 15 CE. Although Jesus's contentious encounter with Annas may suit John's motif of conflict with authorities, the tradition of connecting Annas with Caiaphas "probably suggests that the event itself, while capable of serving John's purposes, also reflects historical tradition,"⁸⁵ on the basis of coherence. That one of the high priests' servants struck Jesus is most likely historically accurate due to the multiple attestation of this tradition in John and the Synoptics.⁸⁶

Jesus's appearance before Pilate in the morning (John 18:28) coheres with what would have been expected of Roman officials and corroborates Mark 15:1, where the council sends Jesus to Pilate in the morning.⁸⁷ On the basis of multiple and independent attestation, Keener asserts "Few historians would dispute that Jesus in fact appeared before Pilate," and cites 1 Tim 6:13 and Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.⁸⁸ Keener cites Philo and Josephus regarding Pilate's brutality and his penchant for short trials, affirming that "The substance of

82 Keener, *John*, 1086.

83 Keener, *John*, 1086. Keener also cites Sanders to the same effect (E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 317).

84 Keener, *John*, 1087. Again, Keener approves of and cites Sanders's presentation (E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* [London: Penguin Press, 1993], 67).

85 Keener, *John*, 1090. Cf. Langlois and Seignobos (187–88), who hold that a claim may be true if it is of such a nature to render falsehood improbable or that its falsehood would be easily detected.

86 Keener, *John*, 1095.

87 Keener, *John*, 1098.

88 Keener, *John*, 1103. Keener believes it is reasonable that Paul wrote 1 Tim with an amanuensis (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014], 600–01), although this is hotly debated (cf. Jerome D. Quinn, "Timothy and Titus, Epistles to" in *ABD*, 6:568–69).

the events in John's account matches historical expectations,"⁸⁹ i.e. the general outline of John's presentation of Jesus before Pilate coheres with what would be historically expected; of course, this need not mean every detail is historical. The Johannine crucifixion by the Romans is not likely an early Christian invention,⁹⁰ thus the criterion of embarrassment is applied. Pilate's hesitation may be historical, but Keener also recognizes "this emphasis [on Pilate's reticence] is understandable for apologetic reasons. Minority sects often validate themselves through reports of praises by those respected among their oppressors; those writing in socially delicate situations also must show proper deference to officials."⁹¹ Keener does not believe Pilate's hesitation is necessarily unhistorical, taking John's larger point to be the guilt of the priestly leadership; but early Christians would naturally have an advantage in presenting the Romans in a fairly positive light where deviations from legal procedures were considered the exception rather than the norm. This line of argumentation shades somewhat in the direction of Sanders's "too much with the grain," but for the reasons of Pilate's mismanagement mentioned above Pilate may have been cautious in prosecuting Jesus.

In his treatment of the Synoptic and Johannine trial narratives, Keener has employed most of the six criteria he discussed in *Historical Jesus*. Where the Synoptics (collectively or individually) overlap with John, or where one or both overlap with Paul or an extra-biblical source, Keener argues on the basis of multiple and independent attestation that the tradition in question is most probably historical. The criterion of coherence repeatedly emerges as Keener demonstrates that much of what the Gospels report either coheres with what could be expected and known of the Jewish leadership or Roman governance from other first century CE sources. Jesus's Roman execution is certainly historical given the embarrassment and shame it could bring to Jesus's early followers. The criterion of Palestinian environment also came into play when Keener discussed the historical likelihood of certain place names within the tradition. The criteria of dissimilarity and Aramaisms did not feature in our analysis, but that is most likely due to the lack of teaching material in the trial narratives.⁹² At no point in this test case has Keener slavishly followed the criteria; he has, instead, used them to argue for greater or lesser degrees of historical probability for passion traditions and on the basis of probability he has

89 Keener, *John*, 1103.

90 Keener, *John*, 1104.

91 Keener, *John*, 1106.

92 Sayings traditions naturally afford greater opportunity for comparison with Jesus and his socio-religious milieu; the trial narratives' action-driven plots and lack of teaching materials simply do not offer much opportunity for this kind of comparison.

argued for what ranges from the historically certain to what is not implausible. According to the general historians reviewed in chapter 2, this is precisely how a historian should operate.

1.4 *Paula Fredriksen*

Paula Fredriksen has written extensively on Jesus for both academic and popular audiences. She rightly observes that "Christianity has always been concerned with the historical Jesus," noting how the Gospels "orient their story in the flow of public time" in light of references to Herod, Augustus, Pilate, and Caiaphas.⁹³ The data made available by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the introduction of new methods into NT studies complicates study of the historical Jesus. That said, Fredriksen boldly (and justifiably) claims "Though the word is unfashionable in academic history right now, I shall breathe it anyway here: We have facts."⁹⁴ The most firm fact of Jesus's life is his crucifixion and death by Pontius Pilate. Fredriksen affirmed this in 1999 and again in 2007 in her chapter "The Historical Jesus, the Scene in the Temple, and the Gospel of John."⁹⁵ Regarding the multiply attested traditions of Jesus's statement against the temple, Fredriksen states "Appeals to criteria of authenticity help, but only to a degree."⁹⁶ She further remarks on the potential application of dissimilarity on Jesus's statements, acknowledging it "is an imperfect criterion for establishing authenticity, but surely at some point it must come into play."⁹⁷ Based on her careful, guarded remarks on the usefulness of the criteria, I cautiously place Fredriksen among those who critically accept the criteria of authenticity.⁹⁸

Fredriksen believes two firm facts of Jesus's life pass different criteria tests, Jesus's baptism by John and his execution by Pilate. Jesus's baptism and execution are at once dissimilar to first century ce Judaism, and despite early Christian attempts to soften these embarrassing moments in Jesus's life these two facts "stood too firmly in the tradition to be dropped; the best various communities could do was soften their effect."⁹⁹ Fredriksen argues further that the Gospels' presentation of Jesus's message coheres with what can be known of

93 Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 3.

94 Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 7.

95 Paula Fredriksen, "The Historical Jesus, the Scene in the Temple, and the Gospel of John," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 249–76, at 253.

96 Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus," 261.

97 Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus," 262.

98 Cf. Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 96.

99 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, 97.

Jesus's historical context, thus indicating an application of the coherence criterion.¹⁰⁰ Regarding Pilate, Philo and Josephus indicate Pilate did not waste time in executing a potential or perceived threat to Roman power; the Gospels' portrayal of Pilate's relatively swift decision to execute Jesus coheres with what can be known about him from the extrabiblical sources.¹⁰¹

Like many contributors to the John, Jesus, and History project, Fredriksen finds more historical value in the Gospel of John than previous generations once believed.¹⁰² Although she does not find the details for John's chronology more accurate than Mark's, she states "the *sort* of itinerary suggested by John helps to make sense of what else we know about Jesus."¹⁰³ Along similar lines, Jesus's hearing before Annas in John is stripped down compared with Mark's hearing/trial. Fredriksen insists these bare presentations are more plausible and more realistic, but they do not inherently indicate historicity.¹⁰⁴ Implicitly Fredriksen applies the criterion of coherence to argue for the plausibility of John's hearing/trial, not certainty; this is precisely how the criterion of general or historical coherence operates among general historians from chapter 2 and the other Jesus researchers reviewed in this chapter. Additionally, it appears Fredriksen may operate with a criterion akin to developing traditions as she prefers John's shorter hearing to Mark's longer trial. As she closes her engaging treatment of Jesus's scene in the temple, she acknowledges the coherence of John's presentation of Jesus's mission with portraits of Jesus available in other data and, more broadly, the value of the Gospel of John for historical Jesus research.

Brown and Keener generally find more of historical value in the Gospels' trial narratives than Fredriksen or Crossan. Fredriksen argues on the basis of criteria and other means that the general presentation of Jesus's hearing and execution in the Gospel of John is more plausible than that Synoptics' portrayals. Crossan's idiosyncratic dating of sources and insistence on using hypothetical sources colors his results, but his use of the criteria is evident nonetheless. What primarily differs in these applications of the criteria, however, is not their respective use of the criteria to assess the probability of certain traditions.

100 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, 99.

101 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, 120.

102 Fredriksen argues "... Jesus's christological self-identity (if he even had one) cannot account for his public, political crucifixion; so if we want to understand why he died as he did, we have to look elsewhere, which means that we have to free ourselves from the dramatic power of Mark's presentation. Here, thinking with [the Gospel of] John can help" ("Historical Jesus," 267–68).

103 Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus," 268.

104 Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus," 269.

2 The Trial(s) of Jesus in the "New and/or Revised Criteria" Category

2.1 E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies

In chapter 1 I reviewed E. P. Sanders's and Margaret Davies's discussion of the criteria of authenticity from their *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*.¹⁰⁵ Although Sanders and Davies prefer to speak of "tests" rather than "criteria," their tests function as criteria. They describe four tests: a range of too much with the grain/against the grain (or degrees of similarity and dissimilarity with early Christianity); uniqueness (which is essentially dissimilarity); multiple attestation (but they shy away from using this test in conjunction with the two-source hypothesis and instead prefer to cross-examine those claims in Paul's undisputed letters with the Gospels); and "views common to friend and foe" (a nuanced application of multiple attestation).¹⁰⁶ These tests aid the historian to assess the degree to which a given tradition is historically accurate; since certainty of historicity is rare, Sanders and Davies typically argue in terms of degrees of probability for this or that tradition. Sanders and Davies fit comfortably in the second group of responses, "offers new and/or revised criteria."

The discussion of tests and the several test cases Sanders and Davies examine within these two chapters in *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* comprise Sanders's most concentrated treatment of criteria. In his earlier and highly influential monograph *Jesus and Judaism*, Sanders argues that Jesus's teaching material alone is not a sufficient basis for Jesus researchers to reconstruct the historical Jesus; instead, reconstructions of Jesus ought to be based on the facts of Jesus's life which will, in turn, provide the proper historical context for studying Jesus's teachings.¹⁰⁷ Sanders thus combines variations of his tests (which are rooted in the standard criteria) and the historical bedrock of Jesus's life to draw certain inferences from which he can reconstruct the life and ministry of Jesus.¹⁰⁸ Sanders does not use criteria alone, for that would place far

105 E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989).

106 See Sanders and Davies, 304–33.

107 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 5–6. For a different view, Witherington suggests "we give the most attention to the sayings material if we are to understand how the historical Jesus viewed himself"; logia, he asserts, were fixed earlier than other traditions about Jesus "with the possible exception of the passion narrative" (*The Christology of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 23).

108 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 13–17, where he specifically mentions dissimilarity, attestation in multiple sources and multiple forms, as well as what he calls "unreliable" form-critical tests such as Semitisms, brevity, and details (15). For these latter criteria, see E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTSMS 9 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

too great a burden on the criteria;¹⁰⁹ he does, however, use the criteria as one component of his method.¹¹⁰

Sanders's most detailed treatment of Jesus's trial and execution can be found in *Jesus and Judaism*; his later *Historical Figure of Jesus* is less detailed but still valuable for examining Sanders's use of criteria. Beginning with the firm facts of Jesus's last week—that the Romans executed Jesus as would-be king and that his disciples formed a movement that was not based on military might—Sanders remarks, "The difficulty of explaining how to hold these two facts together is the fundamental problem involved in attempting to understand the death of Jesus."¹¹¹

The first matter for Sanders is the Synoptics' confusion regarding who attended the trial. The Pharisees, who are often cast as antagonists of Jesus during his ministry, feature little in the trial of Jesus, but "[t]he chief priests, however, play the prime role in all the Gospels. This is very likely historically accurate."¹¹² Sanders also notices that the Gospels are not the only primary sources to show confusion among which players precisely compose Jewish leadership: "The evidence from Josephus about Jewish self-government is also unclear."¹¹³ Sanders will not insist on any particular makeup of the Sanhedrin during the time Pilate was procurator; instead "we should ... be aware that 'trials' and judgments need not have proceeded in the orderly fashion depicted in Mishnah Sanhedrin. There is nothing intrinsically improbable about the account in John, according to which Jesus was interrogated by Annas and Caiaphas, but not 'tried' before the Sanhedrin (John 18.19–28)." The chief priests, however composed, "constitute the one group which remains constant in the Gospels, and they also emerge from the pages of Josephus as the natural

109 Sanders remarks, "No matter what criteria for testing the sayings are used, scholars still need to move beyond the sayings themselves to a broader context than a summary of their contents if they are to address historical questions about Jesus" (*Jesus and Judaism*, 17). See the comparable attitude in Darrell L. Bock, "A Test Case: Jesus's Remarks Before the Sanhedrin: Blasphemy or Hope of Exaltation," in *JSPH*, 205–21. He states: "My position is that a criteria-like approach is not the be-all and end-all for Jesus studies, but that it is *an important and useful component* in such a study," (207, my emphasis).

110 Cf. Scot McKnight's description of Sanders's approach: "Sanders ... while not eschewing the criteriological approach to the Gospels as much as he initially contends, argued that what is needed is not so much a microscopic analysis of individual sayings ... but a big picture understanding of Jesus ..." (*Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005], 43).

111 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 294.

112 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 310.

113 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 312.

Jewish leaders and those who had the ear of the Roman rulers.”¹¹⁴ Here it is evident that Sanders works repeatedly with multiple source attestation to pinpoint the common players in Jesus’s trial, the chief priests. By appealing to Josephus’s corroborating perspective on the confusion regarding the precise composition of Jewish leadership, Sanders has also employed a criterion of general/historical coherence.

Sanders doubts the exchanges between Jesus and the chief priests reflect reality, contending there is nothing in Jesus’s public teaching to make the questions “Are you the Christ, the Son of God?” relevant.¹¹⁵ This peculiar phrasing “looks more like a Christian one than a Jewish one: outside the Christian movement there is no evidence for the combination of ‘Messiah’ and ‘Son of God.’”¹¹⁶ In other words, by placing the combination of “Messiah” and “Son of God” on the lips of the chief priest, Sanders believes the question, thus phrased, is likely unhistorical due to its striking similarity with demonstrably Christian, i.e. later, conceptions and categories. For Sanders, the question runs “too much with the grain.”¹¹⁷

Regarding historical coherence, Sanders finds the evening trial on the first night of Passover historically problematic, and the two trials in Matthew and Mark stretch credulity further. Sanders does not doubt Jesus was arrested and tried, but he despairs of knowing more than these bare facts; the evangelists have not intentionally deceived their audiences, they were simply in the dark as much as historians of Jesus are today.¹¹⁸

In search of a charge that could have led to Jesus’s arrest and execution, Sanders argues “The one point that will not go away is the attack (both by word and deed) against the temple.”¹¹⁹ Jesus’s prediction of the temple’s destruction was likely misunderstood as a threat against the temple; combining a) Jesus’s statement with b) his physical demonstration within the temple courts and c) his noticeable following, Sanders believes these matters alone provide ample reason for the chief priests to have Jesus executed. Jesus’s condemnation coheres with what historians could expect Jewish and/or Roman authorities to do to persons with comparable followings who were declared guilty of similar seemingly (or actually) threatening public displays.¹²⁰ Here again, in Sanders’s

114 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 317.

115 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 297.

116 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 298.

117 Cf. Sanders & Davies, 304–15.

118 “There is a general impression of a confused night, and this is probably accurate” (Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 300).

119 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 301.

120 Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 302–04.

reconstruction, he points to the Gospels' historical coherence with what can be known about persons who found themselves in situations similar to Jesus's. In order to argue that Jesus had enough followers to constitute a "noticeable following," at least one large enough to concern the Jewish leadership, Sanders employs multiple attestation as he cites Paul's statement that there were five hundred who saw the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor 15:6).¹²¹

Sanders published *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, targeted for a more general audience, eight years after *Jesus and Judaism*.¹²² There are two main differences in Sanders's reconstruction of Jesus's last week in the more recent work: 1) the list of known facts has grown slightly to include Jesus's arrest and interrogation by the high priest; 2) it seems Sanders finds the Markan and Matthean trial narratives to be of slightly more historical value than what he argued earlier.¹²³ On the other hand, Sanders's method has remained largely the same. In a section focusing on Jesus's actions, Sanders states "I shall assume that [Jesus] *threateningly predicted* the destruction of the Temple; that is he predicted destruction in such a way as to make some people think that he was threatening it."¹²⁴ In his trial (if, per Sanders, there is anything of historical value to be found), during his crucifixion, and even during Stephen's trial, the tradition that Jesus was in some way connected with a threat to the temple remains. "We cannot attribute this persistent tradition of a threat against the Temple to the authors of the Gospels; they wished it would go away."¹²⁵ By arguing that a tradition that runs counter to the sentiments of the early Christians, one that would clearly be disadvantageous to them, their interests, and the movement as a whole, nevertheless endured in the larger body of Jesus traditions, Sanders is implicitly applying the criterion of embarrassment.

121 Cf. Sanders and Davies, 323–30.

122 Lay-persons and scholars alike will find this work engaging and well-argued.

123 Cf. Helen K. Bond, "E. P. Sanders and the 'Trial' of Jesus," *JSHJ* 13.2/3 (2015): 93–115, especially her subsection "The Trial Narrative: Differences between Jesus and Judaism and The Historical Figure of Jesus" (110–12). Having briefly summarized Sanders's discussion of the historicity in the first two Gospels' trials, Bond remarks "The reader is left with the distinct impression that there is something of historical value in the Markan/Matthean trial narratives" (111). This will not do, however, and she concludes "To give any kind of historical credence to this account is surely misguided. If we are using Mark as a source, it would be better, it seems to me, to build on Mark's brief (and quite possibly traditional) notice of a morning hearing of a council in 15.1. Quite clearly ... we should not reject the historicity of an account of an event simply because it offends our sensitivities, but the Markan/Matthean trial narratives offend *historical* sensibilities in so many ways that to grant them even a reduced or scaled-down value is surely dangerous. Sanders's brilliantly argued and cautious reconstruction in *Jesus and Judaism* is much to be preferred" (112).

124 Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 258 (original emphasis).

125 Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 259.

In treating Jesus's evening before his arrest, Sanders's application of several of the standard criteria is evident. Jesus spent the evening with his disciples and remarked about his blood and the cup at dinner. Sanders believes it is impossible to completely reconcile the accounts of the last supper in Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians, but common elements persist. "Jesus said something about the cup, the bread, his body and his blood."¹²⁶ By comparing and cross-examining these three accounts, Sanders's point is not so much to argue for the historicity of one over the other, but to affirm that the recurring themes and motifs are likely historical. Such an argument is akin to what Allison (who follows Dodd) has termed recurrent attestation. Sanders remarks, "For present purposes I do not need to try to decide precisely what Jesus said about his blood and the cup. Without knowing this, we can see that he regarded the meal as symbolic and as pointing to the future kingdom."¹²⁷ Lastly, Sanders's implicit confidence that Jesus spent the evening dining with his disciples before his arrest is clearly rooted in the supper's multiple attestation in the Gospels and Paul.

In *Historical Figure*, Sanders largely recapitulates his arguments from *Jesus and Judaism* regarding Jesus's arrest. The makeup of the Jewish leadership is as inconsistent in Josephus as it is in the gospel accounts of Jesus's arrest.¹²⁸ "The synoptic descriptions of the high priest and his council agree 100 per cent with Josephus's descriptions of how Jerusalem was governed when it was part of a Roman province."¹²⁹ Here again, Sanders argues that the confusion in the Gospels coheres with what can be known of the Jewish leadership from other Jewish sources.

Turning to the trial scenes, Sanders argues they afford only "possible evidence"—they do not read like a trial transcript.¹³⁰ Once again, one specific detail fails Sanders's test for running too much with the grain (i.e., it is too similar with early Christian doctrine): "Mark's question, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?,' supposes that these two titles go together and interpret one another. But that is a Christian achievement. The mere combination is suspicious, and the statement that the two titles, when combined, constitute blasphemy also looks like Christian creativity."¹³¹ As in *Jesus and Judaism*,

¹²⁶ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 263.

¹²⁷ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 264.

¹²⁸ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 265–69, which largely correspond with *Jesus and Judaism*, 312–17.

¹²⁹ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 269.

¹³⁰ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 269.

¹³¹ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 270. Sanders notes later that Mark attaches a significance to the titles "Messiah" and "Son of God" that "they did not have prior to the development of the church's christology" (272). Cf. *Jesus and Judaism*, 307.

Sanders argues that because the high priests were in charge of keeping civic peace, Caiaphas's behavior coheres with what would be expected of the Jewish leadership under Roman rule. Jesus was perceived to be dangerous and if Caiaphas did not handle the situation the Romans would settle the matter with typical violence and bloodshed. "The author of John attributed to Caiaphas an entirely appropriate statement: 'it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish' (John 11.50)."¹³² That Caiaphas's statement in John is judged "entirely appropriate" does not amount to historicity, but it nevertheless enjoys historical verisimilitude based on what can be known of the Jewish leadership; consequently, the criterion of historical coherence is evident once again.

Regarding Pilate's involvement, Sanders finds a combination of Christian creativity and historical coherence. First, Sanders asserts that Pilate's reluctance in Matt 27:11–26 and John 18:28–19:16 "derive[s] from the desire of the Christians to get along with Rome and to depict Jews as their real opponents."¹³³ He later argues, "The stories of Pilate's reluctance and weakness of will are best explained as Christian propaganda: they are a kind of excuse for Pilate's action which reduces the conflict between the Christian movement and Roman authority."¹³⁴ For Sanders, then, Pilate's reluctance runs too much with the grain of early Christian apologetic. On the other hand, Sanders believes the general outline of Pilate's handling of Jesus coheres precisely with what Pilate was known to do: Sanders cites Philo's comments against Pilate, as well as Josephus's mention that Pilate was dismissed for excessive and misjudged executions.¹³⁵ "This evidence agrees precisely with the sequence of events that the Gospels narrate: Jesus appeared before Pilate and was executed almost immediately, with no further witnesses and with no trial procedure."¹³⁶

One final example from Sanders's work will suffice. In their co-authored *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, Sanders and Davies lay out their tests for assessing the probability of historicity.¹³⁷ As an example of the scale "strongly against the grain/too much with the grain," they treat the (apparent) threat

¹³² Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 272.

¹³³ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 273.

¹³⁴ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 274.

¹³⁵ Sanders cites the following in *Historical Figure*, 274. Philo remarks on Pilate's abuses of power: "It was this final point which particularly exasperated him, for he feared that if they actually sent an embassy they would also expose the rest of his conduct as governor by stating in full the bribes, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and wanton injuries, the executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty" (Philo, *Embassy* 302 [Colson, LCL]); and Josephus, *Ant.* 18.87–88.

¹³⁶ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 274.

¹³⁷ Sanders and Davies, 304–33.

to the temple. The synoptics present Jesus predicting the temple's destruction, but Sanders and Davies believe the evangelists are at pains to distance Jesus from the charge that he would destroy the temple. They note the following developments: 1) Mark 14:58 presents witness testimony that Jesus would destroy the temple "made by hands" and rebuild a temple "not made by hands"; 2) Matt 26:60–61 mentions false witnesses but does not include the comments about hands; 3) Luke omits the witnesses' false testimony altogether. Sanders and Davies see this as an example of "against the grain" of early Christian interests insofar as the evangelists "seem not to have wanted Jesus to appear as a disturber of the public order or a threatener of major institutions."¹³⁸ One can reasonably infer that the principle of embarrassment underlies their argument: the tradition that Jesus was perceived to have threatened the temple remained potent enough for Mark and Matthew to address it or, in Luke's case, to omit it. If embarrassment is not precisely what Sanders has in mind, however, then the charge that Jesus threatened the temple nonetheless ran counter to the interests of early Christians for they had a distinct advantage in presenting their leader as no disturber of the peace but the victim of the Jewish leadership's maltreatment.

From the brief review above, several criteria have emerged from Sanders's (and Davies') historiographic reconstructions. Without stating which criterion he employs, Sanders has clearly employed variations of his tests which are rooted in multiple attestation, general or historical coherence, dissimilarity, and embarrassment. These criteria are not the only tools Sanders and Davies use, but they nevertheless serve a vital role in their historiography.

2.2 *Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz*

Gerd Theissen's methodological connection with Sanders comes by Theissen's own admission: Theissen appreciates Sanders's contributions to the development of the criterion of the plausibility of historical effects, and later says of himself: "G. Theissen argues in a similar manner [to Sanders] when he makes [the criterion of the plausibility of historical effects] a condition for the authenticity of Jesus traditions that they be historically possible within the framework of the Judaism of his time and that they make possible the development of early Christianity."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Sanders and Davies, 315.

¹³⁹ Theissen and Winter, 159. Theissen briefly discusses the issue of criteria in his *Jesus als historische Gestalt: Beiträge zur Jesusforschung*, ed. Annette Merz, FRLANT: Band 202 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 7–12. He argues Jesus researchers should not blindly trust the sources, but there is no reason to doubt their ability to yield

Together with co-author Annette Merz, Theissen begins his investigation of Jesus's trial by discussing the formal legal proceedings depicted in the Gospels, focusing first on the Romans' role. "The legal circumstances and the form of execution clearly show that the Romans were those mainly responsible for the death of Jesus."¹⁴⁰ By citing analogous practices from other provinces as well as literary evidence, Theissen and Merz argue that the Romans typically maintained the right of capital punishment for themselves. The author of John, then, "reproduces the historical situation accurately. There 'the Jews' say 'We are not allowed to execute anyone.'"¹⁴¹ The combination of analogous practices, literary attestation, and the statement in John makes for a complex and robust argument that employs both historical coherence and multiple attestation. First, the criterion of historical coherence is evident in the comparison of how the Romans were known to govern provinces (based on Josephus's work), especially Judea. That the Gospels depict Pilate having the authority to execute Jesus by crucifixion thus coheres with what can be known about Roman rule at the time. Second, the fact of Roman prerogative for capital punishment coupled with John's testimony that "the Jews" did not have legal authority to execute Jesus aligns with Josephus's remarks (*War* 2.117) that the Jews did not have the right of *ius gladii*.¹⁴² Third, Theissen and Merz employ multiple attestation when they cite Josephus and Tacitus on Pilate's role in Jesus's execution.¹⁴³

On the basis of statements from Josephus, Theissen and Merz argue "there is good evidence for [crucifixion] as a Roman penalty in Palestine."¹⁴⁴ That a statement in Josephus (*War* 2.253) mentions also the crucifixion of certain λησται, alongside whom Jesus was crucified (Mark 15:27 and parallels), lends historical coherence to Mark's depiction of Jesus's crucifixion. The Roman legal proceedings were probably formal and official in nature and, therefore, Theissen and Merz believe John (19:13) and Matthew (27:19) may preserve historical memory when they refer to Pilate upon the βῆμα.¹⁴⁵

Suetonius and Dio Cassius refer to the occasional practice of indicating the charges against the accused; the *titulus* would therefore cohere with a known

historical information either (10). This attitude toward the sources is confirmed throughout Theissen's later works.

140 Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 455.

141 Theissen and Merz, 456.

142 Theissen and Merz, 455.

143 Theissen and Merz, 456.

144 Theissen and Merz, 456.

145 Theissen and Merz, 458. Theissen and Merz do not, however, refer to the βῆμα's multiplicity of independent attestation.

historical practice, although Theissen and Merz admit the possibility of invention. More importantly, the accusation presents a Roman perspective—"king of the Jews" rather than "king of Israel" or "Messiah." The potentially troublesome and embarrassing nature of Jesus's alleged crime suggests for Theissen and Merz that "[t]he post-Easter community had no interest in inventing a royal claim on the part of Jesus which would have been open to political misunderstanding and would have caused it difficulties (cf. Acts 17.7)."¹⁴⁶

In treating the Jewish proceedings against Jesus, Theissen and Merz speak of historical "analogies" with the case against Jesus. Jesus's reported hearing prior to the formal trial before Pilate coheres with what happened to Jesus son of Ananias, who had a hearing before the council prior to standing before Albinus (Jos., *War* 6.300–09). Theissen and Merz later discuss the issues raised by bSanh 43 which claims Jesus was charged with being a *mesith*, i.e., someone who leads others into idolatry.¹⁴⁷ Theissen and Merz demur: "Above all, the central charge laid against a *mesith* ... would be absurd in the case of the historical Jesus. The evidence cited belongs in a time in which Jews and Christians had separated and Jews could have seen Jesus as someone who had led people astray and who had made his followers apostates from the Jewish law."¹⁴⁸ Besides being quite a late tradition, Theissen and Merz find these claims dubious due to an implicit use of the criterion of "too much with the grain" (of Jewish polemic), similar to what Sanders has espoused, *mutatis mutandis* (see above). Regarding Jesus's claims to divine status, Theissen and Merz doubt this was the reason for his execution: "Moreover the combination of the three most important christological titles, Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man, in Mark 14.62f. suggests a post-Easter perspective and can hardly be historical."¹⁴⁹ Given the claim's extraordinary similarity with early Christianity, they conclude the most likely reasons Jesus was arrested and executed were his criticism of and action against the temple, and the aristocracy's fear of political unrest. Finally, although there is no record or evidence of a paschal custom to release a prisoner, "an occasional amnesty is imaginable."¹⁵⁰ They cite two first-century CE instances, thus suggesting that Pilate's freeing a prisoner may cohere with historical practice.

¹⁴⁶ Theissen and Merz, 458.

¹⁴⁷ Theissen and Merz, 463.

¹⁴⁸ Theissen and Merz, 463.

¹⁴⁹ Theissen and Merz, 464.

¹⁵⁰ Theissen and Merz, 465.

In 2007, Theissen released an updated version of his delightful historical novel *The Shadow of the Galilean*.¹⁵¹ Although this is a work of fiction, in an appendix Theissen offers a few critical comments on the best primary sources for the study of the historical Jesus. These comments lay bare certain key aspects of Theissen's methodology which are apropos for this study and which are evident in the analysis of Theissen's work above. After quickly describing Mark, Q, Matthew, and Luke, Theissen discusses what can be surmised about preexisting Jesus tradition before the composition of the canonical Gospels, none of which, Theissen believes, were written in Palestine. Despite the non-Palestinian origin of the Gospels, "Many traditions about Jesus have the stamp of a Palestinian setting."¹⁵² Certain statements presuppose knowledge of the history, culture, politics, and geography of Palestine that further indicate a Palestinian provenance. Theissen stresses that these local colorings cohere with what can be known of first century CE Palestine from other sources. Additionally, he finds it significant that within the Gospels Jesus is not presented as commenting on later Christian developments: "Nowhere are local authorities (presbyters, episcopi, and deacons) legitimated by a saying of Jesus. Nowhere does a saying of the earthly Jesus call for baptism as an initiation rite before entering the community. Nowhere is circumcision rejected as a condition of entry for Gentiles."¹⁵³ To Theissen, it is clear that local Christian communities did not freely transform Jesus traditions so as to have Jesus speak exclusively or even primarily to their issues, thus heightening the Jesus-of-the-Gospels' dissimilarity with early Christianity. Lastly, in a brief survey of non-biblical sources relevant to Jesus research, Theissen highlights the mentions of key figures like Pilate and Jesus, references to events like Jesus's crucifixion, or the general picture of historical coherence made evident by statements in Josephus, Philo, and Tacitus. Specific references in these sources to Jesus's crucifixion under Pilate count, for Theissen, as multiple and independent attestation of certain traditions about Jesus.¹⁵⁴

Although Sanders, Davies, Theissen, and Merz prefer their own nuanced tests or criteria, their application of criteria to the trial narratives strongly resembles that of Brown, Keener, and Fredriksen (and Crossan, to a lesser degree). The principle of coherence undergirds the reconstructions of this

151 Gerd Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical Jesus in Narrative Form*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

152 Theissen, *Shadow*, 187.

153 Theissen, *Shadow*, 188.

154 Theissen, *Shadow*, 189–91.

second group, and they frequently rely on the other criteria in order to demonstrate coherence.

3 The Trial(s) of Jesus in the "Marginalizes or Rejects the Criteria" Category

Forty years ago Morna Hooker became one of the first to express deep misgivings with the way Jesus researchers were carrying out their task. Her two articles, "Christology and Methodology" and "On Using the Wrong Tool," could be described as "sleeper hits," articles which did not immediately take historical Jesus scholarship by storm but later (in this case, decades later) became undeniably influential in the rejection of the criteria-based approach. In his closing comments in *JCDA*, Chris Keith conveys his and many others' indebtedness to Morna Hooker.¹⁵⁵ With evident resignation at the time, Hooker believed Jesus researchers *must* use the criteria for there were no better options.¹⁵⁶ For this reason I included her articles in the second category of responses to the criteria, Critical But Accepting; Offers New/Revised Criteria (see chapter 1). However, in the ensuing decades Hooker appears more willing to leave the criteria behind altogether, standing among those scholars who reject the criteria approach.¹⁵⁷ Due to her gradually shifting position, I include her here between the second and third categories.

3.1 Morna D. Hooker

Historians of Jesus rightly debate the nature of his encounters with the Sanhedrin and Pilate. Did Jesus undergo a fully-fledged trial before the Jewish high council, or was it a hearing? Although definitive answers are fleeting, Hooker brings her exegetical and historiographic skill to bear on these questions in her commentary on the Gospel of Mark where she acknowledges the "considerable historical problems" with Mark's depiction of Jesus's trial(s).¹⁵⁸ The proceedings contradict Mishnaic regulations but, she notes, these regulations may reflect traditions which postdate the first century CE. In raising the question of the Jews' authority to execute for capital crimes at this time, the

155 Chris Keith, "The Fall of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus: Concluding Remarks," in *JCDA*, 200–205, at 205.

156 Morna D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570–81, at 580–81.

157 Morna D. Hooker, "Foreword: Forty Years On," in *JCDA*, xiii–xvii. Her final remarks are unequivocal, if not also enthusiastic, "I suggest that it is time to throw away the tools [i.e. criteria] altogether, and to opt for plain common sense" (xvii).

158 Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (London: Hendrickson, 1991), 354.

evidence is unclear since the Mishnah and “references to various executions in the New Testament (e.g. that of Stephen in Acts 6–7) and in Jewish sources” indicate the Jewish authorities can exercise the death penalty, but “[a]ccording to John 18.31 they did not, and this is supported by statements in the Jerusalem Talmud.”¹⁵⁹ However implicit, Hooker’s application of multiple attestation is clear, if not ultimately indecisive: she juxtaposes two sets of multiple references in order to adjudicate what is more historically probable, but (quite reasonably) finds it difficult to determine which set of attestations reflects historical fact. Nevertheless, she concludes with this telling phrase: “Whatever the nature of the examination by the Sanhedrin, therefore, it was in effect no more than a preliminary hearing; whether or not this body had the power to carry out the death sentence, *for some reason it did not do so*.”¹⁶⁰ Following these comments, Hooker argues the evangelists likely exaggerated the Jewish authorities’ role in Jesus’s execution but states unequivocally “Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt that the Jewish leaders had some hand in Jesus’ death.”¹⁶¹ Hooker then addresses problems with the timing of the Sanhedrin’s meeting. While noting the discrepancies among the evangelists’ accounts, Hooker indicates the nighttime meeting cannot be ruled out given Mark’s and John’s agreement over Luke’s early morning meeting. Later she concludes, “We may be *sure* that there was some kind of preliminary hearing before the Jewish authorities, and that the sentence of death was pronounced and executed by the Romans.”¹⁶² In these instances, the implicit use of multiple attestation is clear and at times decisive for Hooker: the primary sources’ consistent testimony indicates the Sanhedrin itself did not execute Jesus.

Multiple attestation is not the only tool Hooker employs in her analysis of Mark’s trial narratives. When certainty cannot be achieved, historians look for evidence that supports a general, historical picture and which coheres with what can be known from other sources. Such a tool is by no means foolproof nor does it verify authenticity but it can check for historical verisimilitude, which is how Hooker uses it in her analysis. The principle of coherence underlies her suspicion of the high priest’s question to Jesus, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61). Such a “direct challenge to Jesus ... contravenes the proper procedure”;¹⁶³ in other words Mark’s presentation contra-

159 Hooker, *Mark*, 354. It is unclear if Stephen’s death in Acts is relevant since the depiction of his death resembles a unofficial killing, e.g. a lynching (i.e. a mob-led murder without a legal trial) rather than a state-sanctioned execution.

160 Hooker, *Mark*, 354–55 (my emphasis).

161 Hooker, *Mark*, 355.

162 Hooker, *Mark*, 356 (my emphasis).

163 Hooker, *Mark*, 360.

dicts what can be known about the council's legal proceedings. This negative use of the criterion of coherence is not definitive, however, for she soon states "Nevertheless, the belief that Jesus was put to death as a messianic claimant is firmly established in the tradition ... [so that] the high priest's question may represent the substance of the accusation."¹⁶⁴ Hooker also highlights the recurrence of Jesus's statement about or against the temple. Whatever Jesus said, the evangelists are at pains to make clear he was accused falsely or he was misunderstood, but the precise wording of Jesus's statements (coming from himself or a witness) differ in each report. Despite some uncertainty regarding what was said, Hooker believes "[t]his evidence (together with the incident in Mark 11) suggests a widespread tradition that Jesus did make some statement about the destruction of the temple. ..."¹⁶⁵ The report of some statement of Jesus which was brought up in the trial/hearing before the council is embedded in the tradition at the deepest levels; on the basis of what can be legitimately compared with Allison's recurrent attestation, Hooker suggests this may reflect what Jesus said regarding the temple's destruction.

On the depiction of Pilate in the Gospels, Hooker is less confident. Her first remarks on Pilate are measured but unequivocal: "The picture of Pilate vacillating and giving in to pressure seems unlikely, since according to other sources he was a particularly obstinate man. ..."¹⁶⁶ Later she states more forcefully, "The idea that Pilate made vain attempts to release Jesus is scarcely credible ...," basing her conclusion on a passage from Philo and two from Josephus that demonstrate Pilate's reputation for inflexibility and obstinacy.¹⁶⁷ Rejecting the Gospels' presentation of Pilate by appealing to multiple accounts of Pilate's behavior is an application of multiple attestation.¹⁶⁸ If Pilate's attitude in the Gospels is "unlikely" and "scarcely credible," his deference toward prisoners at Passover enjoys no extrabiblical corroboration either.¹⁶⁹ The author of Mark may have known some tradition of Barabbas's release and mistakenly believed this was an annual practice, but "[i]n any case, this part of the story looks very much like an attempt to stress the guilt of the Jewish leaders and the reluctance

¹⁶⁴ Hooker, *Mark*, 360.

¹⁶⁵ Hooker, *Mark*, 359.

¹⁶⁶ Hooker, *Mark*, 356–57.

¹⁶⁷ Hooker, *Mark*, 366. Hooker cites one example from Josephus (*Wars*, 2.9.2ff) that shows Pilate conceding on one occasion to the Jews, but for Hooker this is the exception to the norm.

¹⁶⁸ This contradicts her earlier statements about the criterion of multiple attestation. In the concluding paragraphs of "Christology and Methodology" she recommends how to proceed with the criteria: "The criteria that we use will be various. ... the principle of multiple attestation can be used positively, *not negatively*" (486, my emphasis).

¹⁶⁹ Hooker, *Mark*, 366–67.

of the Roman authorities to put Jesus to death—themes which would have served the apologetic purposes of the early Christian community.”¹⁷⁰ The (implicit) test Hooker runs here is virtually the same as Sanders’s and Davies’s “strongly against the grain: too much with the grain”: “A passage ... is historically unlikely if it agrees too closely with what [the evangelists] wished. ...”¹⁷¹ “Apologetic purposes,” as Hooker describes them, are by definition that sort of material which “agrees [...] with what the evangelists wished” per Sanders and Davies. Based on what can be known of Pilate from other sources, then, Hooker believes the Gospels’ portrayals of him is historically unlikely.

To summarize Hooker’s brief but substantive comments on Jesus’s trial(s), she treats first Mark’s depiction of the Sanhedrin. An implicit use of multiple attestation proves indeterminate as the relevant sources diverge: Mishnaic traditions against the Gospels and Jerusalem Talmud. Multiple attestation again emerges when she assesses the veracity of the nighttime trial; for Hooker, multiple attestation does not offer definitive proof but serves as a means for weighing probability, and in her estimation the nocturnal proceedings cannot be ruled out. What does appear to be definitive, however, is the primary sources’ consistent testimony that there was some kind of hearing before the Sanhedrin and that this group did not execute Jesus; both of these affirmations were assessed by means of multiple attestation. Second, a negative application of coherence is implicit in Hooker’s reasoning for doubting the high priest’s question as it is reported in Mark. However, she reasons along lines similar to Allison’s test of recurrent attestation to argue it is probable Jesus said something related to the temple’s destruction and this report was brought up at his trial/hearing before the Sanhedrin. Third, Hooker turns to the Gospels’ depiction of Pilate, and due to an implicit application of multiple attestation (from Philo and Josephus) she doubts Pilate was really so conciliatory as he is portrayed in the Gospels. Furthermore, she suggests Pilate’s attempts to release Jesus are clear indications of early Christian apologetic and, therefore, doubts their historicity; this, I argue, is an application of a tool like Sanders’s and Davies’s “too much with the grain.” Like most exegetes Hooker is not so

¹⁷⁰ Hooker, *Mark*, 367. Rejecting the Gospels’ depiction of Pilate in favor of Philo’s and Josephus’s, with little to no explanation for why Philo and Josephus may have depicted Pilate as they did, Hooker may be guilty of something she warned against in “Christology and Methodology,” “... the real criterion being used is a particular view of the situation” (484), in this case assuming (rightly, of course) the evangelists had apologetic purposes while ignoring Philo’s and Josephus’s apologetic purposes.

¹⁷¹ E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 304–05.

pedantic as to list every criterion she employs to assess this or that tradition for degrees of historical probability, but the use of these tools is nevertheless clear.

Others who wish to marginalize the criteria of authenticity and to operate with new historiographic methods¹⁷² have largely, though not exclusively, opted for a social memory approach that takes seriously the inseparability of historical tradition and interpretation. Dale Allison and Jens Schröter support this approach and, either consequently or coincidentally, argue the criteria are no longer as useful as Jesus researchers once believed. On the basis of this desire to marginalize the traditional criteria, Allison and Schröter are representative of the third category of responses to the criteria among Jesus researchers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

3.2 *Dale C. Allison*

Over the last decade Dale Allison has repeatedly confessed his growing disillusionment with the criteria of authenticity.¹⁷³ The criteria have not yielded scholarly consensus, nor can they deliver what they promise—authenticity of Jesus traditions. In light of these concerns he offers his most extended discussion of how Jesus researchers can nevertheless profitably approach the Gospels in his *Constructing Jesus* where Allison forcefully presents the sobering truths regarding the frailty of memory.¹⁷⁴ Memory irrevocably distorts and humans consistently misremember, but this does not mean memory is useless. Rather than the criteria, Allison recommends an approach based on finding “recurrent attestation” of given traditions, that is, when “a topic or motif or type of story reappears again and again throughout the tradition.”¹⁷⁵ If there is reliable memory to be found in the Gospels, Allison argues, it is in the gist of what is recorded about Jesus’s teaching and self-conception. “We are rightly more confident about the generalities than the particulars” of Jesus’s activities and sayings.¹⁷⁶ After a quick but thorough survey of cognitive memory studies

172 Anthony Le Donne, “The Rise of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus: An Introduction to the Crumbling Foundations of Jesus Research,” in *JCDA*, 3–21. The book opens with Le Donne’s proclamation, “The authors of this book call for an end of the traditional methods employed by Jesus historians” (3).

173 See the following: Dale C. Allison, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), especially 54–60; idem, “How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity,” in *HSHJ*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1:3–30; idem, “It Don’t Come Easy: A History of Disillusionment,” in *JCDA* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 186–99.

174 Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

175 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 19–20. See also 20n.82 where Allison highlights a few instances where others have argued similarly.

176 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 19.

and some discussion of certain recurring gospel motifs, Allison turns to the Gospels to determine what can generally be known of Jesus—without endeavoring to say whether this or that particular tradition did or did not actually happen.¹⁷⁷

In a section dealing with Christology, Allison reiterates the penchant for early Christians to reflect on and re-remember Jesus for their own contexts. Addressing the issue of Jesus's self-conception, Allison concludes the most likely explanation of the Gospel traditions about Jesus's self-conception was that he presented himself as "king of the Jews" and, by implication, that he would rule over a messianic kingdom.¹⁷⁸ This is most relevant for Pilate's execution of Jesus, regarding which Allison admits "This [reasoning] makes sense. If Rome executed Jesus for making himself out to be a king, then in all probability some people, including some sympathizers, or maybe even Jesus himself, hoped him to be such."¹⁷⁹

Allison finds it impossible to decide when the title "king of the Jews" entered into the Passion story. Regardless, "many have nonetheless judged at least the content of the sardonic inscription to preserve reliable memory."¹⁸⁰ Allison cites Dahl approvingly who believes the earliest followers of Jesus would not have invented a (potentially dangerous) politically-charged title like "king of the Jews."¹⁸¹ Allison musters five additional arguments clearly rooted in historical coherence: the Romans did occasionally place charges on placards; the brief indictment coheres with those for others condemned as criminals; "king of the Jews" was a political title, not a religious one; "the irony of 'king of the Jews' matches the parodic character of Roman crucifixion"; and Romans executed criminals publicly, so the reason for Jesus's execution would be public knowledge.¹⁸²

Since no better argument has come forth, Allison believes these combined arguments are currently the strongest. Nevertheless, "Pilate's decision

177 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 231. After dismissing the value of the criteria of authenticity to determine whether this or that tradition is preredactional, Allison remarks, "I will forgo trying to establish that he formulated any of the relevant sayings. And of the stories and events on my list, I will likewise, with one exception—Pilate sentencing Jesus for the crime of being 'king of the Jews'—not endeavor to show that any happened as told. And yet, despite this, we can draw some large and interesting conclusions" (231).

178 Cf. Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 221–304.

179 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 234.

180 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 234.

181 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 235.

182 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 235. For the parodic nature of Roman crucifixion, Allison refers to Joel Marcus, "Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation," *JBL* 125.1 (2006): 73–87.

to crucify [Jesus] must have reckoned with additional facts.”¹⁸³ Allison thinks it “seems likely enough” that Pilate would have interrogated Jesus himself.¹⁸⁴ Citing Josephus’s depiction of Jesus son of Ananias before Albinus, and James and Simon the sons of Judas before Tiberius Alexander, Allison believes Jesus’s appearance before Pilate coheres with what can be known about Roman officials in Palestine. In addition to this (implicit) use of the criterion of historical coherence, Allison cites “passing references to [Pilate’s] role in Josephus ... 1 Tim 6:13 ... [and] Tacitus. ...” Multiple and independent attestation thus indicates for Allison that “the Gospels surely are correct in having Pilate encounter Jesus, if only briefly.”¹⁸⁵

Finally, regarding Pilate’s hesitation to execute Jesus, in a footnote Allison admits “Analogies lend historical verisimilitude to the scene, so maybe the Synoptics preserve the memory of a short-lived local custom, perhaps one of Pilate’s invention; or, alternatively, they wrongly present an occasional affair as an annual ritual.”¹⁸⁶ In this footnote Allison cites passages from Josephus and others who attest to this or a similar practice, thus indicating that the Gospels’ depiction of Pilate’s actions cohere with what can be known of other Roman officials.

3.3 *Jens Schröter*

On the events of Jesus’s last week, Schröter baldly states: “It is certain that Jesus appeared in Jerusalem at the end of his activity and was arrested and executed there.”¹⁸⁷ The Passion narratives contain a special significance for “the self-understanding of early Christianity up to the present”.¹⁸⁸ early Christians did not suppress certain shameful or embarrassing events in the history of their movement such as Jesus’s tortuous execution, the embarrassment of Jesus’s betrayal by one from his closest circle, or that Jesus’s closest followers deserted him—some of whom would become leaders in the fledgling movement. By including these traditions, which Schröter takes to be historical, “early Christianity integrated an equally truthful and self-critical capacity into his own history.”¹⁸⁹

183 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 237.

184 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 238.

185 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 239.

186 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 240n.78.

187 Jens Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth: Jew from Galilee, Savior of the World*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Brian S. Pounds (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 179.

188 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 180.

189 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 180.

In Schröter's ensuing analysis of Jesus's trial, the criteria of multiple attestation and of general or historical coherence emerge at various points. Schröter first affirms the historicity of Jesus's execution under Pilate due to its multiple and independent portrayal in canonical and extra-canonical sources: "The crucifixion under Pontius Pilate therefore belongs to the most certain events of the activity of Jesus."¹⁹⁰

Schröter believes the Gospels exaggerate the degree to which the Jewish leadership is responsible for Jesus's execution. Here, without naming this criterion (though he may be aware of it since he has clearly made use of Sanders's work), Schröter appears to argue along lines of Sanders's "too much with the grain" test: "This manner of presentation [of the Jewish leadership's guilt] reacts to the rejection of the Christian message by the majority of the Jews and this is already a witness for the emerging process of separation between Jews and Christians."¹⁹¹ Notwithstanding, Schröter immediately asserts that the Jewish leadership still had some role to play due to the Gospels' multiple attestation of the fact.¹⁹² Caiaphas's statement in John 11:50 may illustrate this.¹⁹³ On the other hand, Schröter doubts the historical value of Matthew's and Mark's trial narrative due to the legal issues of having a nighttime trial.¹⁹⁴

On the basis of John 11:50, Schröter believes that "What John portrays here as the motive of the Jewish Sanhedrin can be comprehended well historically." Although John's presentation may not be totally historically accurate, Jesus's activity was nevertheless clearly viewed as threatening and on these grounds the Jewish leadership may have considered the necessity of acting against Jesus. On the basis of coherence with what the council could be expected to do, Schröter argues it is "historically probable" they had Jesus arrested to safeguard themselves from another instance of Roman intervention. Here, Schröter finds John's account more historically likely, but he is unsure whether John has "reworked an older report of the Passion or whether he knew one or several of the Synoptic portrayals of the Passion events and possessed additional information."¹⁹⁵

Finding nothing in Jesus's teaching that would directly lead to his arrest, Schröter believes the ever-present potential for political trouble in Jerusalem led the Jerusalem leadership to see Jesus's activity in the temple—which he

190 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 184–85.

191 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185.

192 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185–86.

193 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185–86.

194 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 185.

195 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 186.

believes was “less spectacular than what is described in the Gospels”¹⁹⁶—as the primary reason for Jesus’s arrest. On the basis of coherence with what could be expected of Rome’s swift and brutal involvement, which was a fact of reality for the leadership, Schröter believes the combination of these factors led to Jesus’s arrest.¹⁹⁷ Jesus’s words in the temple were therefore likely understood as a threat to the temple. Schröter opines that “Early Christianity evidently had considerable problems with this tradition,”¹⁹⁸ noting how the Gospels and Acts deal with the accusation that Jesus claimed (falsely) he would destroy the temple. This tradition which ran counter to the interests of early Christians nevertheless persisted because it is rooted in historical memory. Lastly, Schröter suggests the temple action alone was likely not so great a threat because the Romans are never said to have intervened nor is it mentioned in Jesus’s hearing before Pilate.¹⁹⁹

3.4 *Helen K. Bond*

In 1998 Helen Bond published an exciting and detailed study on the historical Pontius Pilate. In the preface’s opening paragraph the criterion of multiple attestation is evident when she states “That Jesus of Nazareth was crucified under Pontius Pilate ... is one of the surest facts of Christianity; it is attested not only by the earliest Christian traditions but also by the Roman historian Tacitus. ...”²⁰⁰ Scholarship on Pilate has often divided along two trajectories, accepting either the harsh Pilate of Philo and Josephus or the more timid and conciliatory Pilate of the Gospels. Bond believes it “should ... be possible to distinguish between the ‘historical Pilate’ ... and the many different Pilates

196 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 187.

197 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 187. Although the people’s cries for the Jewish leadership to crucify Jesus strike too much with the grain for Schröter, he nevertheless affirms “This conflict [between Jesus and the Jewish leadership] is accurately brought to expression in the Gospels, even if they attribute a greater share in the execution to the Jewish leadership and especially to the Jewish people than is likely to have been the case historically” (190).

198 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 188. Schröter states “The driving out of the sellers and money changers should presumably be viewed together with the other tradition related to the temple, namely the tradition about Jesus’s prediction of its destruction” (187). He then cites multiple and independently attested statements to this effect from Mark 13:2b; 15:57–58; Matt 26:60–61; Acts 6:13–14; John 2:19, 21; and *Gos. Thom.* 71.

199 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 190.

200 Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, SNTSMS 100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xi.

of interpretations preserved in the writings of six first-century Jewish and Christian authors.”²⁰¹

Bond first works through Philo’s and Josephus’s accounts before analyzing the Gospels’ records of Pilate; the former accounts prove generally more reliable for Bond than the Gospels. That said, and despite shaping due to theological interests, Bond observes “a certain agreement amongst the evangelists regarding the basic facts [of Jesus’s time before Pilate], an agreement which may well go beyond literary dependency and reflect actual historical events.”²⁰² Shortly thereafter, Bond implicitly employs multiple attestation again when she remarks on the corroboration of Jesus’s appearance before Pilate early the next morning after his arrest.²⁰³ In a footnote on this particular issue, Bond acknowledges that Mark’s and Matthew’s timing of Jesus’s appearance before Pilate is coherent with what can be known of Roman officials.²⁰⁴ Regarding the charge on the *titulus*, Bond plainly states, “Such a charge would surely have been too embarrassing to the early Christians for them to have fabricated it.”²⁰⁵ Lastly, implicitly appealing to the principle of recurrent attestation, Bond believes the actual exchange between Pilate and Jesus is lost to history but the Gospels “are all surely correct, however, when they maintain that the interrogation centered on Jesus’ claim to kingship.”²⁰⁶ Her conclusion is careful and measured, “... there is no fundamental discrepancy between the Pilate of the gospels and that of Josephus and Philo.”²⁰⁷

Continuing her work on prominent figures from Jesus’s last days, in 2004 Bond wrote on Caiaphas. Her method comprises a careful analysis of the best written sources, comparative work with what can be known of other high priests, sociological and archaeological studies. In this brief description of her method Bond implies the use of multiple attestation and coherence, as well as archaeology and other methods; it is clear, then, that for Bond the criteria of authenticity form one component of a complex method. Despite the disciples’ abandonment of Jesus, Bond believes they would have eventually ascertained Jesus’s fate, not to mention Paul’s mention of many believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor 15:6), and therefore it is “highly probable” a general outline of

201 Bond, *Pilate*, xx.

202 Bond, *Pilate*, 197.

203 Bond, *Pilate*, 197.

204 Bond, *Pilate*, 197n.18, citing Pliny, *Ep.* 3.5.9–11 and 6.16.4–5.

205 Bond, *Pilate*, 198.

206 Bond, *Pilate*, 198.

207 Bond, *Pilate*, 201.

what happened to him can be reasonably established.²⁰⁸ The high probability for which Bond argues is clearly rooted in recurrent attestation.

Turning to Jesus's trial in general, Bond argues John's presentation is probably more historically rooted.²⁰⁹ Although John's nighttime arrest is dramatic, that Jesus was arrested at night is corroborated further by Paul and Mark. Josephus mentions "leading men" who sent Jesus to Pilate, which also coheres with what can be known of Jewish practice. Based on this combination of multiply attested traditions and coherence, Bond believes "the broad sequence of events [in John's Jewish trial of Jesus] may conform to what actually happened after Jesus' arrest."²¹⁰ To close her chapter on the theology and history in the trial before the chief priests, Bond concludes with reasoned caution, "Our primary texts are such that it would be impossible to *prove* one narrative over another. What we can do, however, is to evaluate degrees of probability. ..." ²¹¹

Writing some years later, Bond returns to the interplay of history, memory, and interpretation in John's Gospel.²¹² It appears her thinking on historical matters developed somewhat from her earlier work on Pilate, thanks in part to work done by social memory theorists. She finds historical material in John on three levels: 1) the author was "someone with a good and accurate knowledge of first century Palestine," but she insists this does not necessarily reflect on the content of the story; 2) there is broad "agreement between the Johannine and Markan traditions" regarding various points, particularly that Jesus was handed over to Pilate by the Jewish aristocracy, he was crucified, and his followers believed he was resurrected; and 3) John's Gospel presents a historical view of Jesus.²¹³ Although social memory theory can heighten the historian's sensitivity to the interplay of memory and history, the second level of history Bond noted above is clearly rooted in the application of the criterion of multiple attestation.

The following year Bond favorably reviewed Keith's and LeDonne's *JCDA* and concluded she has "now been completely won over by those who would

208 Helen K. Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 59.

209 Helen K. Bond, "At the Court of the High Priest: History and Theology in John 18:13–24," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 313–24, at 314–18.

210 Bond, "Court of the High Priest," 323.

211 Bond, "Court of the High Priest," 323 (original emphasis).

212 Helen K. Bond, "How Historical Is John's Gospel?: History, Memory and the Reception of Jesus Tradition in the Late First Century," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 36 (2013): 75–90.

213 Bond, "How Historical Is John's Gospel?," 89–90.

jettison the criteria altogether. ..."²¹⁴ On this basis, Bond currently fits comfortably in the third stream of responses to the criteria. In 2015, Bond critically reviewed Sanders's work on Jesus's trial from *Jesus and Judaism* and *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. Bond's conclusions are relevant for although she agrees with rejecting the criteria approach, she largely approves of Sanders's method and generally with his conclusions:

One of the most impressive elements of Sanders's work is his masterly ability to envisage and articulate the 'big picture.' ... Rather, as we have seen, he presents his case by building upon generally agreed facts, and relating them to a wonderfully vivid and detailed awareness of the first-century context. ... If he is correct in his assumption that the earliest followers had very little accurate knowledge about that confused night, and if he is right that we can reconstruct only the broadest of outlines (Jesus was arrested, taken briefly to the high priest, then passed to Pilate who ordered his crucifixion)—views which, again, I would share—then the synoptic passion narratives (just as much as John) are quite clearly theologically inspired presentations of Jesus' last few hours and constant historical questions are out of place.²¹⁵

Bond agrees with Sanders that we can reconstruct the general outline of what happened the night and morning before Jesus was executed. As I argued above, Sanders reconstructs these broad outlines by the criteria and other methods. The most careful and most honest scholars acknowledge when their thinking changes due to new evidence or the application of a new and/or improved method, and Bond is to be commended for engaging, detailed, and insightful work on the historical Jesus, Pilate, and Caiaphas.

Although Allison, Schröter, and Bond, wish to dispense with the criteria, the standard criteria of multiple attestation, coherence, dissimilarity, and embarrassment nevertheless repeatedly emerge as they assess the historical probability of gospel traditions. Rarely do they name which criterion they apply—perhaps to do so would be pedantic. It is also noteworthy that when these three scholars employ the standard criteria, they do so with essentially the same effect—to assess historical probability—as those who accept and wish to revise the criteria.

214 Helen K. Bond, "Crumbling Criteria: Constructing an Authentic Jesus—By Helen Bond," *Marginalia*, 1 April 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191029120931/http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/crumbling-criteria-constructing-an-authentic-jesus-by-helen-bond/> (no page number).

215 Bond, "E. P. Sanders," 112–13.

4 Summary of Analysis and Conclusion

In the analysis above I highlighted the use of several standard criteria of authenticity from Jesus researchers representing a stance on the criteria. On the basis of their own remarks on the value of the criteria, Raymond Brown, John Dominic Crossan, Craig Keener, and Paula Fredriksen represent the first group. E. P. Sanders, Margaret Davies, Gerd Theissen, and Annette Merz do not completely adopt the standard criteria nor do they totally eschew them; instead, they offer new or revised criteria and in so doing they represent the second group. Lastly, due to their contributions to *JCDA* and other remarks calling for the marginalization or rejection of the criteria approach, Dale Allison, Jens Schröter, and Helen Bond represent the third group. Jesus's trial served as the test case for determining how (or if) scholars apply the criteria.

The methodological analysis above has made clear that, despite one's approach or method, certain criteria inevitably arise in the work of historiographic reconstruction; multiple and independent attestation, general and historical coherence, embarrassment, and dissimilarity appeared throughout (though, not to the total exclusion of other criteria). These four criteria were found in chapter 2 to comprise some of the primary historiographic criteria espoused by general historians.

5 Excursus: Modern Historians of Greco-Roman Antiquity on Jesus's Trial

At the beginning of chapter 3, I highlighted Stanley Porter's remarks on the apparent non-use of tools akin to the standard criteria of Jesus research among general historians. To summarize Porter briefly: general historians do not use the term "criteria of authenticity" nor do they claim to employ tools that are similar to the standard criteria; instead, they employ other methods.²¹⁶ Several of the general historians' works reviewed in chapter 2 do speak of "criteria of authenticity," but by this they refer to a collection of tools to determine whether the document under investigation actually originates with the source it credits as author; general historians thus understand "authenticity" quite differently than Jesus researchers. More to the point, Porter falters here because he has only superficially engaged the general historians' works he reviewed. Porter's assessment that the criteria of authenticity are idiosyncratic to NT studies and therefore suspect (see above) is frequently rehearsed by opponents of the

216 Cf. Porter, "Criteria of Authenticity," in *HSHJ* 2:700–05.

criteria approach, but the analysis below demonstrates that, in this instance, Porter's analysis may be short-sighted. The following excursus more closely examines the method of two of the historians Porter specifically mentioned and reviewed. In the excursus below I examine two general historians' application of these same criteria or tools on the accounts of Jesus's trial, and it will become evident the aforementioned criteria emerge, *contra* Porter.

5.1 *Michael Grant*

Historian Michael Grant is most widely known for his works on classical Greece and Rome, but he has also applied his critical skills to the world of the NT²¹⁷ as well as to the Gospels. In his monograph on Jesus and the Gospels, Grant seeks "to apply the techniques of the historian to [the life of Jesus]," i.e., to "look at the Gospels in the way one would look at other ancient historical sources: endeavouring to reconstruct what really happened."²¹⁸ What follows is his reconstruction of Jesus's life and, to a lesser extent, the content of Jesus's teaching.

Before analyzing Grant's application of historiographic method to the trial narratives, it will be valuable first to review Grant's discussion of method because, presumably, his theory should inform his practice. Grant opens flatly: "The extraction from the Gospels of evidence about the life and career of Jesus is a singularly difficult, delicate process."²¹⁹ After briefly rehearsing the wildly divergent presentations of Jesus from previous centuries, Grant argues that historical research into the life of Jesus is nevertheless possible so long as historians are "on [their] guard against introducing unconscious modernizations. ... Certainly, every student will have his own preconceptions. But he must be vigilant to keep them within limits."²²⁰ For Grant, the historian's belief or unbelief in Jesus should not noticeably color his or her conclusions.

The historians' approach to the Gospels is to assume neither complete truth or fiction of gospel traditions, but to critically evaluate each item on its own merits.²²¹ To do so, the historian employs certain tools, which Grant labels "criteria": "It is most important, therefore, when we are deciding which parts of the Gospels can be accepted or rejected, to be clear about the exact nature

217 Michael Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (New York: Scribner, 1973); idem, *Saint Paul* (New York: Scribner, 1976).

218 Grant, *Jesus*, 2. Immediately following this Grant confesses difficulty with the phrase "what really happened" because "it is beyond the power of human beings to be really objective," but he will try nonetheless.

219 Grant, *Jesus*, 197.

220 Grant, *Jesus*, 198 and 200, respectively.

221 Grant, *Jesus*, 201.

of the criteria likely to achieve this result.”²²² The first criterion Grant treats is multiple (source) attestation. He defines it as “when the same incident or theme or saying is reported in more than one Gospel, this repetition has been quoted as evidence that it is authentic, and goes back to Jesus.”²²³ NT scholars should recognize the lack of nuance in this definition since Grant speaks broadly of repetition in the “Gospels” rather than in, e.g., Mark and Q or Mark and specific independent sources like M or L, or independent traditions found in both Mark and John (which tends to carry more weight with NT scholars), or even independent traditions in the Gospels and Paul or Josephus or another source.²²⁴ Grant’s overbroad definition ought, then, to place his dismissal of multiple attestation in perspective for it is unduly pessimistic: “this argument [of multiple attestation] is valueless since the evangelists demonstrably shared so much material from common sources, and even when such a common source cannot be proved or identified it may still very often be justifiably suspected.”²²⁵ For this reason, Grant also rejects the value of multiple forms attestation. Grant further rejects a criterion that would posit the lateness of fulfillment passages for, “as we have seen, Jesus himself sometimes deliberately arranged and adjusted his acts and sayings in order to make sure they *did* fulfil scriptural predictions.”²²⁶

After discounting multiple source and form attestation, Grant praises dissimilarity and embarrassment: “A further criterion requires the rejection from the lifetime of Jesus of all material which seems to be derived from the days of the Christian Church as it existed after his death. *This yardstick has to be used very often* and, in spite of the acute difficulty of applying it correctly, *it provides our principal valid method of research.*”²²⁷ Grant unequivocally affirms the value of dissimilarity to early Christianity, and under the broad principle of dissimilarity he further remarks, “One way of attempting this task [of

222 Grant, *Jesus*, 201.

223 Grant, *Jesus*, 201. By mentioning themes, Grant’s definition comes markedly close to Allison’s recurrent attestation (see above).

224 Grant is not unaware of the various explanations for the Gospels’ creation, however: cf. the discussion in his *Jesus*, 183–91.

225 Grant, *Jesus*, 201. Compare Grant’s discussion of multiple attestation with that of Sanders and Davies, who try to avoid counting multiple attestation of a gospel tradition in multiple gospels and prefer to argue from “the strongest group of passages under this head [of multiple attestation]: those which are found in one or more gospel accounts and in Paul’s letters” (323). In the analysis of Grant’s method, it will be clear that he applies multiple attestation in a way that coheres neatly with Sanders’s and Davies’s emphasis on coupling attestation of a gospel tradition with a non-gospel source.

226 Grant, *Jesus*, 202 (original emphasis).

227 Grant, *Jesus*, 202 (my emphasis).

historiographic investigation] is to look out for surprises ... that is to say, [that] which clashes with what we should *expect* to find in something written after the time of Jesus";²²⁸ this leads him directly to the criterion of embarrassment. Repeatedly, "the evangelists manifestly *do* include some unpalatable or even incomprehensible doings and sayings of Jesus, and incidents in his life. They include them because they were so indissolubly incorporated in the tradition that their elimination was impracticable; in other words, because they were genuine."²²⁹ These points which run counter to what one might expect often cohere (surprisingly) with other points which recur throughout the tradition; in other words, according to Grant, "The consistency, therefore, of the tradition in [the Gospels'] pages suggests that the picture they present is largely authentic."²³⁰ This last statement virtually concludes his appendix on method,²³¹ but in ending this way it seems Grant would affirm something akin to Allison's recurrent attestation: the frequent occurrence of certain traditions suggests, at the very least, the authenticity of said traditions. In sum, Grant affirms dissimilarity and embarrassment and, it seems, recurring traditions, but claims to be unconvinced of multiple source and form attestation.

Having acknowledged the profound difficulties in determining precisely what happened during the trial, Grant nevertheless seems confident on several matters due to the Gospels' agreement. Without stating it explicitly, by appealing to all four Gospels' agreement on certain events Grant is applying the criterion of multiple attestation; arguing along these lines appears to run counter to what Grant claimed regarding a tradition's attestation in multiple Gospels (see above), but elsewhere Grant makes a similar claim based on similar evidence: "For the constant references in the Gospels [i.e., all the Gospels] to strife between the Pharisees and scribes on the one hand, and Jesus on the other, leave no doubt that such strife, even if the Gospels exaggerated it, had genuinely existed."²³² The accusation against Jesus stems from his apparent threat against the temple; given this tradition's coherence with other statements by Jesus, his personal application of scriptural tradition to his teaching and ministry, and his belief "that some things took priority over sacrificial rites," Grant is also convinced that Jesus likely said something perceived as threatening to the temple.²³³

228 Grant, *Jesus*, 202 (original emphasis).

229 Grant, *Jesus*, 203.

230 Grant, *Jesus*, 204.

231 All that follows is a two-sentence paragraph that reaffirms the possibility of deriving information about Jesus from the Gospels (204).

232 Grant, *Jesus*, 117.

233 Grant, *Jesus*, 158.

Although each evangelist treats the temple threat differently, Grant focuses on John's account, specifically Jesus's reference to the resurrection of his body. For Grant, this too much resembles early Christian belief: Jesus's purported words "show a grandiose boastfulness out of keeping with his usual explanations of his mission, so that they have to be rejected as subsequent inventions."²³⁴ Grant similarly rejects Mark's report of Jesus's reference to a future glorious appearance as "implausible, reflecting the exalted reverence the early Church felt for his divinity."²³⁵ Grant has excised both of these traditions on the basis of too great a similarity to early Christianity, the one criterion that he believed ought "to be used very often."²³⁶

In much of the following analysis Grant situates the titles of divinity that arise in the trials within their proper socio-cultural, religious, and political contexts.²³⁷ For the charges to convince Pilate, Grant argues the Jewish leadership "had to look over their charges against Jesus once again, and make them sound no longer theological but political."²³⁸ Due to a lack of coherence with what can be known from Philo,²³⁹ Grant disbelieves the Gospels' portrayal of Pilate as the indecisive leader willing to acquit Jesus; this relatively positive portrait of Pilate is too similar with early Christian interests to be genuine.²⁴⁰ That being said, Grant finds Pilate's agreement to execute Jesus plausible given the likelihood that Pilate would not have wanted the Jewish leadership to complain to Caesar that he was not harsh on those expressing disloyalty to Rome.²⁴¹ Ultimately, based on the implicit use of historical coherence, Grant argues that Pilate would not have been so conciliatory with the Jewish leadership but that he could plausibly be expected to agree to Jesus's execution.

When Jesus speaks of a kingdom before Pilate, Grant once again dismisses these remarks as too similar with early Christian conceptions of Jesus and his mission.²⁴² But an even greater example of Christian creativity can be seen in the Barabbas tradition. Grant sees no basis for a custom of paschal release, and even the name "Jesus Barabbas" is "impossibly odd ... probably an invention of the early Church, devised in order to exhibit a simple rhetorical antithesis between the good Jesus and this fictitious bad one, so that the Jews could

²³⁴ Grant, *Jesus*, 158.

²³⁵ Grant, *Jesus*, 159.

²³⁶ Grant, *Jesus*, 202.

²³⁷ Cf. Grant, *Jesus*, 159–62.

²³⁸ Grant, *Jesus*, 161.

²³⁹ Grant, *Jesus*, 162n.36 (p. 231).

²⁴⁰ Grant, *Jesus*, 163.

²⁴¹ Grant, *Jesus*, 163.

²⁴² Grant, *Jesus*, 164.

be shown for evermore to have rejected his authentic, good counterpart.”²⁴³ Although Jesus’s mention of a kingdom, the custom of paschal release, and the person of Barabbas are unlikely historical for being too similar with early Christianity, Grant absolutely affirms Jesus’s condemnation by Pilate because it runs directly counter to early Christian interests: “Pilate’s responsibility for the sentence must be genuine because the evangelist can only have found it highly unwelcome that Jesus was convicted by a Roman governor and would have suppressed the fact had it not been irremovable.”²⁴⁴ In a final comment, Grant affirms the crucifixion due to its independent attestation in Josephus.²⁴⁵

5.2 *Robin Lane Fox*

Although the Gospels are clearly informed by faith in the Christ, historian Robin Lane Fox believes the Jesus of history is nonetheless recoverable to a certain extent. The Gospels are “not straightforward histories, but they do relate significant events and sayings from the single life of a historical Jesus: they are biographical, in this sense, with a strong religious purpose.”²⁴⁶ The criteria of authenticity emerge from Lane Fox’s broad evaluation of the Gospels’ historical value: the social patterns and institutions they depict, Jewish or Roman, generally *cohere* with what can be known from papyri, inscriptions, Josephus, and Roman historians who incidentally depict provincial life; at the same time, “in the Gospels, Jesus never enters the two new Greek cities which had been recently founded in Galilee, although this type of city and its social structure were to be the setting for most of Christianity after his death”;²⁴⁷ this suggests a degree of dissimilarity with later Christian interests.²⁴⁸ For the purposes of historiography, Lane Fox argues the historical Jesus *is* highly relevant for the Christ of faith, for “God was not believed to have raised just any old person from the tomb.”²⁴⁹

In order to determine what can be known about Jesus, Lane Fox discusses his methods for evaluating gospel traditions. “The secure minimum lies in actions which were publicly recognized and on which all Gospels agree.”²⁵⁰ Public facts are those which occurred publicly, naturally; Lane Fox cites a

243 Grant, *Jesus*, 165.

244 Grant, *Jesus*, 165.

245 Grant, *Jesus*, 166.

246 Robin Lane Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 284.

247 Lane Fox, 284. Cf. the discussion on 283–85.

248 Cf. Theissen, *Shadow*, 188.

249 Lane Fox, 286.

250 Lane Fox, 286. Cf. Langlois and Seignobos, 187.

handful of examples like Jesus's election of twelve disciples and Paul's corroboration thereof, Jesus's preaching on the kingdom of God, the conflict that arose between Jesus and other influential groups of Jewish compatriots, and his Roman execution under an inscription for his crime.²⁵¹ On the basis of multiple attestation amongst those Gospels which Lane Fox believes are least likely related (John and Luke), and due to the coherence of Jesus's treatment with that of other criminals known from Josephus, the historian can bolster the secured minimum. To this point Lane Fox demonstrates the general coherence of the Gospels' depiction of Jesus by the Romans with that of similar prisoners with whom Rome dealt in Judea. He concludes, "People's reactions are not necessarily consistent across thirty years, but there does seem to be a pattern here."²⁵²

The Gospels occasionally "[make] contact with external evidence, Greek, Roman and Jewish" and, concerning the trial, all "four Gospels do agree on a framework of events" including Jesus's arrest, his interrogation, his presence before Pilate, his flogging, the release of Barabbas, and Jesus's crucifixion.²⁵³ Here again Lane Fox highlights his method.²⁵⁴ He dismisses the value of rabbinic descriptions of the Sanhedrin due to their late date and the "imagined details of this glorious council of the distant past [which] idealized its conduct."²⁵⁵ More useful, on the other hand, is the material from Roman sources which indicate that Pilate's actions generally conform to the practices of governors known from other sources.²⁵⁶ That the Jewish aristocracy played no small part in securing Jesus's execution is, to Lane Fox, as certain as the Romans' involvement; the multiple attestation of the Jewish aristocracy's pressuring Pilate and the general coherence that Pilate's actions demonstrate in acquiescing to their urging suggest the probability of these traditions.²⁵⁷

251 Lane Fox, 286.

252 Lane Fox, 288.

253 Lane Fox, 288.

254 He notes, "one conventional tactic is to match [the Gospels'] details to external evidence, especially to Jewish and Roman evidence for the legal procedures of a trial. I will begin with this same tactic, although it requires us to pick details out of each Gospel ..." (289). At the very least this process describes general coherence and, as will be seen in the analysis below, if the corroboration refers to the same saying or event, multiple attestation applies as well.

255 Lane Fox, 291.

256 Lane Fox, 292. See the discussion on 293 for some problems with coherence that, although important, do not undermine the general veracity of the Gospels' trial sequence.

257 Lane Fox, 293–94.

In the second section of Lane Fox's analysis, he probes the differences between each of the canonical trial narratives.²⁵⁸ Not wishing to uncritically harmonize the accounts due to major (e.g., the dating of the crucifixion) and minor (e.g., who from the Jewish leadership questioned Jesus, and when) disagreements,²⁵⁹ Lane Fox generally favors the chronology in John's Gospel given its stated connection with a primary source, i.e. the beloved disciple whom he believes authored the Fourth Gospel.²⁶⁰ What follows is Lane Fox's account-by-account historical-critical assessment. For Mark (whom Matthew followed), Lane Fox highlights the coherence with what can be known from other sources and concludes "The [trial] story is human and intelligible, and it can be matched (except for the Passover privilege) with Roman governors' behaviour in trials elsewhere in the empire."²⁶¹ Regarding Luke's account, Lane Fox dismisses the Antipas story on the basis of too great a similarity with early Christianity: "The story sits awkwardly with all the other Gospels, but it would have appealed to Luke not just because it fulfilled [Psalm 2], but because it emphasized a greater truth: that Jesus was wholly guiltless and freely declared to be so."²⁶² On the basis of coherence, John's narrative is to be preferred for it "fits very neatly with the evidence for policing and arrest in other provincial communities under Roman rule."²⁶³ Furthermore, Lane Fox finds impressive the public nature of Jesus's crucifixion in John's account: that the day and time are specified more firmly root the execution in historical memory.²⁶⁴

258 Cf. Lane Fox, 294–304.

259 See Lane Fox's negative remarks about harmonization on 302, although he may overstate his case.

260 Lane Fox, 295. He remarks "There were theological advantages in either dating: the synoptics made the Last Supper into a Passover meal; the fourth Gospel made the eve of Passover the day of the death of Jesus, the 'Lamb of God.' ... In my view, the fourth Gospel is correct (it rests on a primary source), and the first Christians wrongly equated their first Lord's Supper with a Passover" (295). *Pace* Lane Fox, Porter may be correct when he remarks that Lane Fox "arrives at what would be seen by New Testament scholars as unorthodox or at least unusual conclusions," referring specifically to Lane Fox's acceptance of the Beloved Disciple as the author of John, which Lane Fox believes to be "historically the most valuable of the Gospels" (Porter, "Criteria of Authenticity" in *HSHJ*, 2:703 and 703n.34, citing Lane Fox, 205).

261 Lane Fox, 296.

262 Lane Fox, 297.

263 Lane Fox, 300–01.

264 Lane Fox, 299–304. See 302–03 for Lane Fox's reasons for siding with John's narrative, but 304 for why he does not accept John's characterization of the Jewish leadership's motivation.

6 Conclusion

Returning to Porter's chapter on the criteria in *HSIJ*, he discusses the work of certain classicists who have also written about Jesus in order to remark on their use or non-use of the standard criteria.²⁶⁵ Porter's main point is that these scholars' "criteria for discussing Jesus often vary significantly from those of the theologians."²⁶⁶ He first cites Grant's critiques of the criteria, saying "what is interesting to note is first [Grant's] beginning with the traditional criteria of authenticity, but then his move to a set of criteria that seek to find continuity and consistency, and that are in fact *quite different* from those of the traditional criteria. In a way, Grant's criteria emerge out of, only to depart from, the standard criteria."²⁶⁷ The problem with Porter's summary and treatment of Grant's work is that Porter has dealt only with Grant's theory and not also with his practice, for theory and practice do not always align—as I have shown in chapters 1 and 3. Moreover, it is by no means clear that Grant has departed from the standard criteria, as Porter has claimed, at least not from dissimilarity and embarrassment.²⁶⁸ Once the historian has applied these criteria—critically, of course, and not haphazardly—Grant believes "these authentic points and others add up to a coherent general impression of Jesus, persisting in spite of the differences between the evangelists."²⁶⁹ But arguing for the authenticity of that which coheres with what has been demonstrated to be authentic is a clear manifestation of the standard criterion of coherence—one of the standard criteria Porter claims Grant has departed from. Against Porter's reading of Grant, then, Grant seems to discount only the usefulness of multiple attestation, but even then he claims to discount only the application of multiple attestation to traditions appearing within the canonical Gospels. However, as was repeatedly shown above, Grant does employ multiple attestation from the Gospels and other sources, and occasionally from within the Gospels too.

Porter also points out that although Lane Fox does not use the terminology of the standard criteria, he may use something akin to the criterion of coherence.²⁷⁰ It is surprising, however, that Porter has missed Lane Fox's clear application of multiple attestation. For example, the public facts to which Lane Fox refers—and which are evident in the particular lines Porter quotes

265 In addition to Grant and Lane Fox, Porter briefly treats T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (London: SCM, 1917).

266 Porter, "The Criteria of Authenticity" in *HSIJ*, 701.

267 Porter, "The Criteria of Authenticity," in *HSIJ*, 704 (my emphasis).

268 See Grant's praise of the criterion of dissimilarity (*Jesus*, 202).

269 Grant, *Jesus*, 203.

270 Porter, "The Criteria of Authenticity" in *HSIJ*, 703.

from Lane Fox²⁷¹—are all multiply attested, and on this basis Lane Fox believes these facts establish a secure minimum for Jesus's life and teaching. Other uses of multiple attestation are also apparent, and the analysis above showed that Lane Fox employs dissimilarity as well. Porter is most certainly correct when he states that these historians do not present the typical, standard criteria known to historical Jesus studies, but Porter's truncated treatment of their method obfuscates how Grant and Lane Fox have actually proceeded. Once again, in the practice of historiography on Jesus's trial(s) the criteria have emerged from where they were not expected. But does this hold true for historians who work outside biblical studies? Do they employ the historiographic criteria promoted by Langlois and Seignobos, Gottschalk, Tosh, et al in their reconstructions? In the following Chapter I demonstrate what criteria—if any—modern historians apply in their reconstructions on another particular test case, Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon.²⁷²

271 Porter cites the following from Lane Fox, where multiple attestation and historical coherence are clearly in use: "We can compare the four Gospels' accounts and give particular credit to facts or sayings on which agreement is most significant: one interesting test is also to look for agreements between the Gospels which are otherwise the least closely related, John and Luke, for instance, or even John and Matthew. Another method is to compare the 'secure minimum' with our knowledge of other 'criminals' who confronted Romans in Judaea before the war of 68–70" ("The Criteria of Authenticity" in *HSHJ*, 2:703, citing Lane Fox, 268).

272 I selected this particular test case prior to finding Anthony Cross's reference to the crossing in his "Historical Methodology and New Testament Study," *Them* 22.3 (1997): 28–51, at 43n.8. Cross's aims and mine are substantively different.

The Use of Authenticating Criteria among Modern Historians of Greco-Roman Antiquity

A Test Case on Caesar's Crossing of the Rubicon

In chapter 2 I summarized the development of modern historiography from its Renaissance- and Reformation-era roots, and I discussed how the advancement of scientific methods in biblical criticism and related fields influenced the growth and maturation of historiographic method. These explorations set the historical and intellectual context for the ensuing review of several treatments of historiographic methodology spanning before and after the twentieth century. The historians I selected represent different epochs and foci of historiographic methodology: some were more positivistic in their outlook, others approached a critical realist perspective; some operated prior to the advent of deconstructionism and the linguistic turn, others within it and/or beyond. Several of the historians reviewed above also remarked on the necessity and value of auxiliary sciences for historiography.¹ I further identified and defined certain tools or criteria that modern historians claim to use to verify statements in historical documents. Four main criteria emerged: multiple and independent attestation, historical coherence, counter-to-expectation (or dissimilarity), and the closely related criterion of embarrassment. It is also of paramount importance to note that, in devising and promulgating these criteria, not one of the historians reviewed above believed they were offering a foolproof method that guaranteed certainty in achieving absolute or objective truth; instead, they consistently spoke of probability and verisimilitude.²

In this chapter I will highlight instances where modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity employ these very criteria on a specific test case, Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon river in January, 49 BCE, which effectively

1 Cf. Charles Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. George Godfrey Berry (London: Duckworth, 1912), 42–59; Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 126–31; Robert Jones Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3rd ed. (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1980), 138–47; Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 43–57. According to these historians the auxiliary sciences serve external critical ends, such as determining authorship, provenance, date, and authenticity.

2 Cf. Langlois and Seignobos, 185–86; Gottschalk, 139–40.

initiated the Roman civil war. This event provides an intriguing test case for investigating how modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity use the very criteria that emerged from the review in chapter 2 for the following reasons. First, multiple authors report this event which occurred similarly long ago as Jesus's trial and execution. Second, each account differs in both major and minor respects. In these two respects this test case compares nicely with the test case from chapter 3. Third, since the crossing of the Rubicon is one of the most (in)famous incidents from Roman history, it has received a critical mass of scholarly attention and publication that enables the type of methodological analysis I perform below.

1 Caesar's Crossing of the Rubicon in Greco-Roman Historiography

It would be pedantic to remark on the significance of the Roman civil war, not just for NT studies but for all of Greco-Roman history;³ from the tumult ensuing Caesar's assassination, Augustus effected a much-needed and much-lauded era of peace during which time Jesus was born and the remainder of NT events would occur. Julius Caesar provided the spark that lit the fires of war when he crossed the Rubicon River into Italy proper with his army.⁴ Historians from the imperial era depicted the Rubicon as the place where Caesar last stopped to ponder what would come of his actions before, at long last, he rushed across the river to take Ariminum (modern day Rimini). But not every account of the Roman civil war's beginning includes Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon (CCR).

3 For standard treatments of Rome's rise to dominance, see Chester G. Starr, *The Emergence of Rome as Ruler of the Western World* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1982); and Martin Goodman and Jane Sherwood, *The Roman World, 44 BC–AD 180*, Routledge History of the Ancient World (London: Routledge, 1997). A more popular but still engaging and valuable work comes from Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016). For works detailing the civil war, see the following: Richard A. Billows, *Julius Caesar: The Colossus of Rome* (London: Routledge, 2009); Robert Garland, *Julius Caesar* (Bristol: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2003); Matthias Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, revised. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar: The Life of a Colossus* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006); Antony Kamm, *Julius Caesar: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Christian Meier, *Caesar: A Biography*, trans. David McLintock (London: HarperCollins, 1995); Robin Seager, *Pompey the Great: A Political Biography*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); W. Jeffrey Tatum, *Always I Am Caesar* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Graham Wylie, "The Road to Pharsalus," *Latomus* 51.3 (1992): 557–65; Josiah Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a helpful introduction to several major, ancient historians, see Stephen Usher, *The Historians of Greece and Rome*, 2nd ed. (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1985).

4 The river has not been positively identified. Cf. Goldsworthy, 377, and the fuller discussion and bibliography in Gelzer, 193n.3 (carried over to 194).

In what remains of Livy's works there is no mention whatsoever of the Rubicon or even Ariminum.⁵ Velleius Paterculus is the first extant historian to refer to CCR. Perhaps owing to some influence from Lucan's epic poem, the crossing took on grander importance, for every subsequent account of the beginning of the civil war treats the crossing in detail.⁶

Although book, chapter, and verse references alone might suffice for studying a gospel pericope to engage in Jesus research, most students and scholars of the NT are less familiar with events from broader Greco-Roman history that do not relate directly to NT events or personages.⁷ For ease of reference the relevant passages are given below, arranged in chronological order of publication.

1.1 *Velleius Paterculus*⁸

In the consulship of Lentulus and Marcellus, seven hundred and three years after the founding of the city and seventy-eight years before your consulship, Marcus Vinicius, the civil war burst into flame. The one leader seemed to have the better cause, the other the stronger; on the one was the appearance, on the other the reality of power; Pompey was armed with the authority of the senate, Caesar with the devotion of his soldiers. The consuls and the senate conferred the supreme authority not on Pompey but on his cause. No effort was omitted by Caesar that could be tried in the interest of peace, but no offer of his was accepted by the Pompeians. Of the two consuls, one showed more bitterness than was fair, the other, Lentulus, could not save himself from ruin without bringing ruin upon the state, while Marcus Cato insisted that they should fight to the death rather than allow the republic to accept a single dictate from

5 Livy's extant works do not include the crossing, but see Robert A. Tucker, "What Actually Happened at the Rubicon?," *Historia* 37.2 (1988): 245–48, at 246 for what may have been included in Livy's no-longer extant history and how Livy may have served as a source for Lucan. For fragmentary remains of authors, including citations to works no longer extant, see T. J. Cornell, ed., *The Fragments of the Roman Historians*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). On historians of Rome in general, see Ronald Mellor, *The Historians of Ancient Rome: An Anthology of the Major Writings*, 3rd ed., Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World (London: Routledge, 2012).

6 With the exception of Dio Cassius (41.4.1).

7 E.g., Acts 18:1–2, where Luke mentions Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome and Suetonius, *Claud.* 25; or the mentions of Pontius Pilate in the NT (Matt 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 3:1; John 18:28; Acts 3:13; 1 Tim 6:13) and in Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

8 Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.49.4 (Shipley, LCL). A brief but valuable introduction to historians of the emperors can be found in John Matthews, "The Emperor and His Historians," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola, 2 vols., *Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 290–304.

a mere citizen. The stern Roman of the old-fashioned type would praise the cause of Pompey, the politic would follow the lead of Caesar, recognizing that while there was on the one side greater prestige, the other was the more formidable.

When at last, rejecting all the demands of Caesar, who was content to retain the title to the province, with but a single legion, the senate decreed that he should enter the city as a private citizen and should as such, submit himself to the votes of the Roman people in his candidacy for the consulship, Caesar concluded that war was inevitable and crossed the Rubicon with his army. Gnaeus Pompeius, the consuls, and the majority of the senate abandoned first the city, then Italy, and crossed the sea to Dyrrachium.

1.2 *Lucan, The Civil War*⁹

By now Caesar had swept across the frozen Alps and had, in his mind, pictured widespread rebellions and certain war. When they arrived at the little Rubicon's waves, there appeared to the leader a huge image—his fearful motherland shining through the dark night, her face stricken with grief; towers crowned her head, and her gray hair was streaming loose, strands torn out; her shoulders were bare. She stood close by, and sobs interrupted her speech:

“Where are you going from here?
where are you taking my standards, men? If you come as citizens,
under the law, here you must stop.”

At this, a shiver
flickered along the leader's limbs, his scalp prickled, numbness
stopped him in his tracks; he stood rooted to the riverbank.
At last he spoke:

“O God, Thunderer, who watch the great
City's walls from Tarpeia's Rock; and Phrygian Hearth-gods
of Julius' like; also you mysteries of rapt Quirinus;
and Jove, Father of Latium, at home on lofty Alba;
Vesta's first; and O Thou peer of highest divinity,

9 Lucan, *Pharsalia*, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce, Masters of Latin Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 9–10. Cf. Lucan, *The Civil War*, 1.182–227 (Duff, LCL). Lucan's account merits consideration for its roots in actual events and the striking correspondences with other historians' accounts.

Rome: bless this venture! I am not hunting You down with frenzied arms—behold! Here am I, victor on land and sea, Caesar, everywhere—now as always, if allowed—Your solider. *He shall be guilty, he who has made me Your foe.*” Then he loosed the restraints of war and through the swollen stream carried the standards in haste. Imagine the parched savannahs of sweltering Libya: a lion has sighted a nearby foe; he crouches down, hesitant, while he rouses his anger; and soon, when he has whipped himself up with his savage tail, with mane erect and a throaty grumble from gaping jaws, he lets out a roar; then, if a lance flung by a Moor should pierce him, or hunting spears sink in his broad chest, he runs on despite the steel, ignoring the previous wound. From a modest spring the ruby-red Rubicon falls and flows with shallow water when summer burns white-hot; it creeps through the valley-bottoms, a clear boundary marking Gallic meadows off from Ausonian farmland. But now, winter was boosting its strength and, three nights running, the Huntress’ horn, heavy with rain, had increased its waters, as had the Alps, thawed by gusts of warm, moist air. First the chargers were ranged slantwise across the stream to take the brunt of the current; then, the ford made passable, the rest of the crowd splashed through waves the breakwater slowed. When he had swept across the torrent and touched the opposite bank, Caesar came to a halt on Hesperia’s forbidden soil. “Here” (he said) “here I leave peace and the trespassed laws behind. Fortune, I follow you! Let there be no more talk of pacts—I have trusted them enough. Our judge now must be war.”

1.3 *Plutarch, Caesar*¹⁰

Now, Caesar had with him not more than three hundred horsemen and five thousand legionaries; for the rest of his army had been left beyond the Alps, and was to be brought up by those whom he had sent for the purpose. He saw, however, that the beginning of his enterprise and its initial step did not require a large force at present, but must take advantage of the golden moment by showing amazing boldness and speed, since he could strike terror into his enemies by an unexpected blow more easily

¹⁰ Plutarch, *Caesar* 32 (Perrin, LCL).

than he could overwhelm them by an attack in full force. He therefore ordered his centurions and other officers, taking their swords only, and without the rest of their arms, to occupy Ariminum, a large city of Gaul, avoiding commotion and bloodshed as far as possible; and he entrusted this force to Hortensius.

He himself spent the day in public, attending and watching the exercises of gladiators; but a little before evening he bathed and dressed and went into the banqueting hall. Here he held brief converse with those who had been invited to supper, and just as it was getting dark rose and went away, after addressing courteously most of his guests and bidding them await his return. To a few of his friends, however, he had previously given directions to follow him, not all by the same route, but some by one way and some by another. He himself mounted one of his hired carts and drove at first along another road, then turned towards Ariminum. When he came to the river which separates Cisalpine Gaul from the rest of Italy (it is called the Rubicon), and began to reflect, now that he drew nearer to the fearful step and was agitated by the magnitude of his ventures, he checked his speed. Then, halting in his course, he communed with himself a long time in silence as his resolution wavered back and forth, and his purpose then suffered change after change. For a long time, too, he discussed his perplexities with his friends who were present, among whom was Asinius Pollio, estimating the great evils for all mankind which would follow their passage of the river, and the wide fame of it which they would leave to posterity. But finally, with a sort of passion, as if abandoning calculation and casting himself upon the future, and uttering the phrase with which men usually prelude their plunge into desperate and daring fortunes, "Let the die be cast," he hastened to cross the river; and going at full speed now for the rest of the time, before daybreak he dashed into Ariminum and took possession of it. It is said, moreover, that on the night before he crossed the river he had an unnatural dream; he thought, namely, that he was having incestuous intercourse with his own mother.

1.4 *Plutarch, Pompey*¹¹

And now word was brought that Caesar had seized Ariminum, a large city of Italy, and was marching directly upon Rome with all his forces. But this

11 *Plutarch, Pomp.* 60 (Perrin, LCL).

was false. For he was marching with no more than three hundred horsemen and five thousand men-at-arms; the rest of his forces were beyond the Alps, and he did not wait for them, since he wished to fall upon his enemies suddenly, when they were in confusion and did not expect him, rather than to give them time and fight them after they were prepared. And so, when he was come to the river Rubicon, which was the boundary of the province allotted to him, he stood in silence and delayed to cross, reasoning with himself, of course, upon the magnitude of his adventure. Then, like one who casts himself from a precipice into a yawning abyss, he closed the eyes of reason and put a veil between them and his peril, and calling out in Greek to the bystanders these words only, "Let the die be cast," he set his army across.

As soon as the report of this came flying to Rome and the city was filled with tumult, consternation, and a fear that was beyond compare, the senate at once went in a body and in all haste to Pompey, and the magistrates came too. And when Tullus asked Pompey about an army and a military force, and Pompey, after some delay, said timidly that he had in readiness the soldiers who had come from Caesar, and thought that he could speedily assemble also those who had been previously levied, thirty thousand in number, Tullus cried aloud, "Thou hast deceived us, Pompey!" and advised sending envoys to Caesar; and a certain Favonius, a man otherwise of no bad character, but who often thought that his insolent presumption was an imitation of Cato's boldness of speech, ordered Pompey to stamp upon the ground and call up the forces which he used to promise. But Pompey bore this ill-timed raillery with meekness; and when Cato reminded him of what he had said to him at the outset about Caesar, he replied that what Cato had said was more prophetic, but what he himself had done was more friendly.

1.5 *Suetonius, Divus Julius*¹²

Accordingly, when word came that the veto of the tribunes had been set aside and they themselves had left the city, he at once sent on a few cohorts with all secrecy, and then, to disarm suspicion, concealed his purpose by appearing at a public show, inspecting the plans of a gladiatorial school which he intended building, and joining as usual in a banquet with a large company. It was not until after sunset that he set out very

12 Suetonius, *Jul.* 31–33 (Rolfe, LCL).

privily with a small company, taking the mules from a bakeshop hard by and harnessing them to a carriage; and when his lights went out and he lost his way, he was astray for some time, but at last found a guide at dawn and got back to the road on foot by narrow bypaths. Then, overtaking his cohorts at the river Rubicon, which was the boundary of his province, he paused for a while, and realising what a step he was taking, he turned to those about him and said: "Even yet we may draw back; but once cross yon little bridge, and the whole issue is with the sword."

As he stood in doubt, this sign was given him. On a sudden there appeared hard by a being of wondrous stature and beauty, who sat and played upon a reed; and when not only the shepherds flocked to hear him, but many of the soldiers left their posts, and among them some of the trumpeters, the apparition snatched a trumpet from one of them, rushed to the river, and sounding the war-note with mighty blast, strode to the opposite bank. Then Caesar cried: "Take we the course which the signs of the gods and the false dealing of our foes point out. The die is cast," said he.

Accordingly, crossing with his army, and welcoming the tribunes of the commons, who had come to him after being driven from Rome, he harangued the soldiers with tears, and rending his robe from his breast besought their faithful service. It is even thought that he promised every man a knight's estate, but that came of a misunderstanding; for since he often pointed to the finger of his left hand as he addressed them and urged them on, declaring that to satisfy all those who helped him to defend his honour he would gladly tear his very ring from his hand, those on the edge of the assembly, who could see him better than they could hear his words, assumed that he said what his gesture seemed to mean; and so the report went about that he had promised them the right of the ring and four hundred thousand sesterces as well.

1.6 *Appian, Civil Wars*¹³

Accordingly, he sent forward the centurions with a few of their bravest troops in peaceful garb to go inside the walls of Ariminum and take it by surprise. This was the first town in Italy after leaving Cisalpine Gaul. Toward evening Caesar himself rose from a banquet on a plea of indisposition, leaving his friends who were still feasting. He mounted his

13 *Appian, Civil Wars* 2.5.35 (White, LCL).

chariot and drove toward Ariminum, his cavalry following at a short distance. When his course brought him to the river Rubicon, which forms the boundary line of Italy, he stopped and, while gazing at the stream, revolved in his mind the evils that would result, should he cross the river in arms. Recovering himself, he said to those who were present, "My friends, to leave this stream uncrossed will breed manifold distress for me; to cross it, for all mankind." Thereupon, he crossed with a rush like one inspired, uttering the familiar phrase, "The die is cast: so let it be!" Then he resumed his hasty journey and took possession of Ariminum about daybreak, advanced beyond it, stationed guards at the commanding positions, and, either by force or by kindness, mastered all whom he fell in with. As is usual in cases of panic, there was flight and migration from all the country-side in disorder and tears, the people having no exact knowledge, but thinking that Caesar was pushing on with all his might and with an immense army.

1.7 *Orosius, Seven Books of History against the Pagans*¹⁴

Caesar proceeded to Ravenna. M. Antonius and P. [sic] Cassius, tribunes of the people, sought to exercise their veto on Caesar's behalf. They were prevented by the consul Lentulus and excluded from the senate and the forum. They set out for Caesar, accompanied by Curio and Caelius. Caesar crossed the river Rubicon. As soon as he reached Ariminum, he explained what action was required to the five cohorts which at the time were all that he had and with which, as Livy puts it, he attacked the wide world. Complaining bitterly about the wrongs which had been done to him, he declared that the purpose of the civil war was to restore the tribunes to their country.

14 Orosius, *Against the Pagans*, 6.15.2–3. This translation comes from Peter Bicknell and Dana Nielsen, "Five Cohorts Against the World," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, IX, ed. C. Deroux (Brussels: Latomus, 1998), 138–66, at 150. For a full translation of Orosius's work, see Paulus Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. A. T. Fear (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010). For a brief summary of his life and works, see David Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 135–49.

1.8 *Summary of Primary Sources for CCR*

Velleius Paterculus, writing in the early first century CE, only briefly mentions CCR. In broad strokes he contrasts Caesar's and his supporters' position with that of Pompey and his party: although Pompey had legality and the Senate on his side, Caesar wielded true power and might by means of his army. After Pompey rejected Caesar's entreaties for peace, Caesar solemnly concluded civil war was inevitable and crossed the Rubicon with his army. Velleius Paterculus gives no further details for the events surrounding CCR. He does not depict Caesar ruminating on the decision to cross the river, there are no famous last words, nor do any apparitions appear to dissuade or exhort Caesar to one decision or another as in later works.

Like Velleius Paterculus, Lucan too recalls Caesar's awareness of the gravity of his actions. But unlike the previous, barer account, Lucan displays his skill as an epic poet with vivid depictions of the cisalpine landscape and with the dramatic appearance of a distraught Patria. She pleads with Caesar, who seems to pause for a moment but only to consider Fortune his true master as he forded the river toward Ariminum.¹⁵ Lucan likens Caesar to a lion bent on destruction which would run itself through a spear to attack an enemy. Focusing as much on the river itself as on Caesar's deliberation, Lucan remarks on the Rubicon's source and even the volume of its flow in the winter. Due to the rushing torrent Lucan portrays the cavalry slowing the swollen stream so the infantry could march through into Italian territory before taking Ariminum.

Whereas Velleius depicts Caesar hesitating on the banks of the Rubicon for but a moment, Plutarch presents the general agonizing over the momentous decision to invade Italy, mentioning specifically Asinius Pollio (whose account was likely a source for Plutarch) among those with the general. Prior to the river crossing, Plutarch reports on Caesar's afternoon and evening activities of watching gladiators and attending a dinner. He also says Caesar furtively sent troops to capture Ariminum quickly and quietly. As soon as Caesar excused himself from dinner he and other associates rode toward the river by different routes so as not to arouse suspicion. According to Lucan, Caesar opted to follow Fortune into Italy as he roused himself like a great lion and crossed the river; Plutarch also comments on Caesar's passion as he threw himself upon the vicissitudes of fortune and plunged into Italy. But rather than Patria

15 Focusing on Lucan's literary presentation, Jeffrey Beneker astutely observes, "Despite Patria's insistence, the Rubicon no longer represents respect for an old-fashioned *ius* that subordinates the citizen to the state. Instead, the river marks the point where Fortuna supersedes Patria, and where a citizen may begin to justify his actions through victory in war" ("The Crossing of the Rubicon and the Outbreak of Civil War in Cicero, Lucan, Plutarch, and Suetonius," *Phoenix* 65.1/2 [2011]: 74–99), at 92.

entreating Caesar to yield, Caesar is the sole speaker and utters the illustrious phrase "Let the die be cast!" Lastly, almost as an afterthought, Plutarch records a dream omen, that some say on the night prior to crossing the river Caesar dreamed he was having incestuous intercourse with his mother.

Plutarch's version of CCR in his life of Pompey is essentially similar but contains a few differences in detail.¹⁶ No fellow confidants appear in this account (compare with Pollio's appearance in *Caes.*), leaving Caesar as the sole speaker who nevertheless utters the line "Let the die be cast!" In *Pomp.*, Plutarch reports the dictum was spoken in Greek, and that these were the only words he spoke; while Caesar deliberated before crossing the river, he apparently did so silently. Despite these variances, Plutarch presents Caesar's mental state virtually the same as in *Caes.*, so that once Caesar decides to cross he is nearly wild and flies blindly across the river as he rushes toward Ariminum.

Suetonius begins his narration of CCR by portraying Caesar engaged in activities similar to those Plutarch describes, including Caesar's arrangement to send troops ahead of him to Ariminum. Instead of watching gladiators, however, Suetonius shows Caesar inspecting the plans for a gladiatorial school he wanted to build; later that evening Caesar dined with friends at a banquet until he quietly left to rendezvous with his troops whom he had told to gather at the river. Suetonius is the only one to mention Caesar losing his way toward the river. Once he found the road he spoke briefly with his soldiers, contemplating the fateful decision before him. As in Lucan, Suetonius reports an apparition, but one with a rather different response than the weeping Patria: a large figure playing a reed pipe drew quite a crowd until he grabbed a trumpet from one of the soldiers and sounded the signal to advance as he rushed across the river. Caesar then shouted that to cross the river must be the will of the gods and that the die had been cast (rather than the imperative "Let the die be cast!" as in Plutarch). Suetonius also reports what Caesar had promised his troops and how had continued to plead with them to follow him (after crossing the river).

Appian follows suit by remarking on the clandestine mission of Caesar's troops to take and hold Ariminum prior to the river crossing. Caesar attended a dinner but left early with the excuse of indigestion. Gradually his remaining troops followed him toward the river where, once he arrived, he mused on what would transpire if he were to cross with his army. No apparition appeared to offer guidance; Caesar alone steeled his resolve as he remarked on the grave consequences of whether to cross. Appian depicts Caesar's compulsion as if he

16 For a brief treatment of some differences between these accounts, see Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?: What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 67–69.

were divinely inspired, at which point Caesar utters the indicative “The die is cast. ...” He successfully captured Ariminum and quickly began to push south while opposing forces panicked.

Orosius’s later account follows Livy’s contemporary history, even quoting him directly.¹⁷ He briefly mentions the river and Caesar’s arrival at Ariminum. He does not specify where Caesar was when he complained about the injustices he had faced, but by placing the complaint after depicting Caesar in Ariminum suggests he was already beyond the river and in the town.

1.9 *Similarities and Differences in Accounts of CCR*

The ancient sources for CCR share several elements. Three of the authors record Caesar’s apparently innocuous activities the evening he crossed the river, mentioning something related to gladiators and a dinner from which Caesar planned to leave early, having arranged with some of his troops to follow him inconspicuously. Most of the authors include some depiction of Caesar standing before the river contemplating his next moves and most report some utterance by Caesar. In two of the accounts an apparition appears, causing Caesar and his soldiers to pause and reflect before crossing the river. Before or after the crossing most accounts include at least a brief comment on the soldiers Caesar sent to take Ariminum with stealth and speed. To summarize: from beginning to end the accounts present CCR in virtually the same order with many of the same elements.

Despite these several similarities, differences abound in the details. Velleius Paterculus foregrounds the political dynamics prior to CCR and only incidentally mentions the Rubicon as the physical boundary Caesar crossed which, by way of implication, caused Caesar to cross from legal into illegal action.¹⁸ Orosius’s account is similarly stark. On the other hand, Lucan and the historians vividly recount Caesar’s afternoon and evening festivities prior to the clandestine crossing. Plutarch says Caesar watched gladiators, whereas Suetonius has Caesar inspecting plans for a gladiatorial school; these events are by no

17 Anke Rondholz, “Crossing the Rubicon: A Historiographical Study,” *Mnemosyne* 62.3 (2009): 432–50, observes that the remaining portions of Livy, the *periochae*, are highly selective and in light of Orosius’s appeal to Livy and his presentation of Caesar crossing the river “(strongly) suggests” it was in Livy (433).

18 Cf. Rondholz who remarks “It is widely assumed that this transgressive step of Caesar precipitated the civil war that led to the final destruction of the Roman republic. Caesar, however, had been moving in a legally gray area for quite a while when the senate had decided that he should leave his province by November 13th, 50 BCE” (433).

means mutually exclusive and both could easily have occurred.¹⁹ Plutarch alone notes that Caesar bathed before dinner and that he indicated to his fellow guests he would return shortly as he left. Suetonius omits the details of Caesar's departure, but Appian reports that Caesar gave the excuse of indigestion; this excuse is not inherently incompatible with Plutarch's account (that Caesar would return soon) but one might reasonably expect indigestion to leave one sequestered for the remainder of the evening. Suetonius alone states Caesar lost his way to the river and that he eventually found a guide. Having arrived at the river, Lucan relates an otherworldly visitor, as does Suetonius, but the similarities end there. In Lucan, Patria weeps and pleads with Caesar and his army to lay down their arms. Despite some initial hesitation, Caesar invokes several deities, including Patria herself, to hold his enemies accountable for their misdeeds and to show him favor as he prepares to cross the river. The apparition in Suetonius, on the other hand, appears as a sign for Caesar to continue his advance: a reed-playing figure takes up a trumpet and sounds the war cry thus signaling to Caesar that his plans are justified both by the gods and his enemies' maltreatment of him.

2 What Happened at the Rubicon?

By comparing the ancient witnesses for CCR one can discern a basic outline of that evening: Caesar sent troops before him to capture Ariminum while he remained in Ravenna long enough not to arouse suspicion until he and a select group of troops crossed the river into Italy proper. But the numerous divergences in the accounts raise the question, what actually happened at the Rubicon? Historians have posed the same question for some time and in order to answer that question they have used many of the tools and methods of verification discussed in chapter 2 above.²⁰

19 Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar: The Life of a Colossus* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), implies Caesar did both in his summary of Caesar's afternoon (377); cf. also Maria Wyke, *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 68.

20 See, e.g., the following: Beneker, "The Crossing of the Rubicon"; Bicknell and Nielsen, "Five Cohorts"; Tenney Frank, "Caesar at the Rubicon," *CIQ* 1.2/3 (1907): 223–25; León Herrmann, "Le Prodiges Du Rubicon," *REA* 37.4 (1935): 435–37; Ernst Hohl, "Cäsar Am Rubico," *Hermes* 80.2 (1952): 246–49; Rondholz, "Crossing the Rubicon"; Frank A. Sirianni, "Caesar's Decision to Cross the Rubicon," *L'Antiquité Classique* 48.2 (1979): 636–38; G. R. Stanton, "Why Did Caesar Cross the Rubicon?," *Historia* 52.1 (2003): 67–94; and Tucker, "What Actually Happened at the Rubicon?"

The most thorough recent treatment of CCR comes from historians Peter Bicknell and Dana Nielsen. I will review their historiographic method before analyzing the use of authenticating criteria from other modern historians who treat CCR. Before reexamining the circumstances Caesar faced when he crossed the Rubicon Bicknell and Nielsen cross examine the ancient witnesses for the crossing and suggest that Livy's record (which they believe survives in part in Suetonius and Orosius) is preferable to Asinius Pollio's.²¹ Bicknell and Nielsen argue that the similarities between Plutarch's and Appian's accounts forcefully indicate they relied on a common source, Pollio.²² "Resemblance [of the two accounts] frequently extends to vocabulary. ...²³ In respect of shared content, order of presentation, substance, and thrust [the accounts] are identical. Details furnished by either Plutarch ... or Appian alone are never incompatible, or fit uncomfortably, with the representations of the other."²⁴ In this case, Bicknell and Nielsen implicitly utilize Langlois's and Seignobos's and Gottschalk's principle for establishing the independence of sources by highlighting the high degree of coincidence between Plutarch's and Appian's accounts: "if two statements present the same details in the same order, they must be derived from a common observation; different observations are

21 Bicknell and Nielsen, "Five Cohorts." They do not include Lucan's account in their analysis but they do in an appendix, largely discounting any historical value it might retain: "Given Lucan's evident capacity for free invention, it would be rash to jump to the conclusion that any elements of his narrative that correspond with the representations of one of the mainstream sources reflect indebtedness rather than his own coincidental creativity" (164). A different view on Lucan's value as historiography can be found in Alexander F. Wensler, "Lucan und Livius zum Januar 49 v. Chr.: Quellenkundliche Beobachtungen," *Historia* 38.2 (1989): 250–54. Wensler argues Lucan's account is valuable for two main reasons: first, works during the early Principate were routinely suppressed if they favored the senate over the princeps; second, Wensler argues Lucan used Livy as a source and can therefore be an aid in recreating certain of Livy's lost books.

Since Caesar himself fails to mention the crossing, I have chosen to omit his own account of the civil war as well (Julius Caesar, *Civil War*, trans. Cynthia Damon, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016], 1.8.1, cf. Damon's edition pp. xxxvi and 15n.24 where she notes Caesar does not mention crossing the Rubicon when he arrived in Ariminum, modern day Rimini).

22 Regarding Pollio as a source for Appian and Plutarch, cf. Hohl, 247.

23 Bicknell and Nielsen provide their own translations of Plutarch, *Caes.* 31.2–32.8 and Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.33–35 (on 140–42). Within the translations they note specific shared vocabulary (given as inflected forms in order of appearance): τὸλμης, τάχει / ταχουργίας, ἐκπλήξειν / ἐκπλήξει, περιφερόμενον, δρόμου, ἀνα / λογιζόμενος, ὥρμησε / ὀρμή, δρόμῳ. Cf. Rondholz, 438; and Llewelyn Morgan, "The Autopsy of C. Asinius Pollio," *JRS* 90 (2000): 51–69.

24 Bicknell and Nielsen, 143. Almost a century earlier, Frank held the same opinion, 223–25.

bound to diverge somewhere.”²⁵ As seen above, Plutarch specifically mentions Pollio—whose account of contemporary Roman history is now tragically lost—as Caesar’s confidante that fateful evening. According to Bicknell and Nielsen, Plutarch’s reference to Pollio’s presence that night indicates that Pollio served as Plutarch’s (primary) source; Appian does not mention Pollio, but given how closely Appian’s account follows Plutarch’s Bicknell and Nielsen argue Appian also had access to Pollio’s work. It may be safer to argue less dogmatically, however, for Appian may have had access to Pollio’s account or he may have followed Plutarch, or both.²⁶

Both Caesar and Pollio, of course, were eyewitnesses. Yet if Pollio serves as Plutarch’s and Appian’s source for CCR, then his account contradicts Caesar’s regarding two different matters. First, Bicknell and Nielsen argue that Pollio indicates that Caesar pushed his soldiers beyond Ariminum not long after its taking. Bicknell and Nielsen point out “In this respect, [Pollio’s] representations correspond with those of Cicero’s correspondence and are certainly correct.”²⁷ Bicknell and Nielsen clearly employ the criterion of multiple and independent attestation in this instance. Recall that Langlois and Seignobos (and the many others following them) argued that observations are independent if they are “contained in different documents, written by different authors, who belonged to different groups, and worked under different conditions.”²⁸ Bicknell and Nielsen appear to recognize what many of the historians reviewed in chapter 2 affirm: Pollio’s and Cicero’s comments on Caesar’s military operations satisfy these conditions for multiplicity and independence.

The second instance of contradiction regards Caesar’s encounter with certain harried tribunes fleeing Rome who were favorable to him. Caesar recalls meeting them in Ariminum (within Italy proper), whereas Pollio (via Plutarch and Appian) indicates the tribunes appeared in Ravenna (outside Italy, where Caesar could legally operate with his army). Pollio recounts how the tribunes were presented to Caesar’s soldiers to work the army into a fervor against Caesar’s enemies back in Rome.²⁹ According to Bicknell and Nielsen, three

25 See Langlois and Seignobos, 200–01: “The details of a social fact are so manifold, and there are so many different ways of looking at the same fact, that two independent observers cannot possibly give completely coincident accounts; if two statements present the same details in the same order, they must be derived from a common observation; different observations are bound to diverge somewhere.”

26 Cf. Gottschalk, 168, who warns that similarities of this nature can indicate copying or influence by one source from another, or that both draw on a third source.

27 Bicknell and Nielsen, 143.

28 Langlois and Seignobos, 202–03.

29 Cf. Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.33; Plutarch, *Ant.* 5.10; *Caes.* 31.3.

issues face the historian: why would Caesar, who appears to falsify some actions and justify others throughout his account, miss this opportunity to justify his actions by placing the tribunes in Ravenna and not in Ariminum (where it was illegal for him to be with his army);³⁰ second, Pollio finds himself not only in the uncomfortable position of committing treason with Caesar—he has also directly contradicted another eyewitness whose account was known to others; third, and most pertinent for our purposes, why ought a historian prefer one account over the other, for Caesar and Pollio were both eyewitnesses?

Regarding the first issue, by remarking that he met the tribunes only after illegally invading Italy, Caesar appears to have stated something “prejudicial to the effect which [he] wished to produce.”³¹ This stipulation of Langlois and Seignobos operates virtually with the same rationale as the criterion of embarrassment; it would be reasonable for a historian to follow Caesar here, although certainty is elusive. Tenny Frank admits that here Caesar has confessed something which runs directly counter to his interests: “... Caesar has falsified to his own disadvantage. Why should Caesar ... make his own case worse than it actually was by stating that he had begun the civil war before the tribunes offered him a plausible excuse?”³² But Frank is not so easily convinced Caesar can be taken at his word because, he argues, this statement is inauthentic. Instead, he contends that after Caesar’s death his manuscripts fell into Antony’s possession and Antony changed the place of the meeting to present Caesar in the worst possible light. Frank thus bases his argument on the conjecture of what Antony could have done to respond to Caesar’s mistreatment of him.³³

The second issue now arises, and here Bicknell and Nielsen disagree with Frank’s speculation. They argue it was Pollio who adjusted the location of meeting from Ariminum to Ravenna to soften his participation in what was considered active rebellion. By examining the internal coherence of Pollio’s report (i.e., the version of Pollio extant in Plutarch and Appian), Bicknell and Nielsen

30 See the discussion in Bicknell and Nielsen, 143–45, and Frank.

31 Langlois and Seignobos, 186.

32 Frank, 223.

33 Frank (at 224n.2) cites Cicero, who remarks, “You, yes, you, Marcus Antonius, were the first one to give Gaius Caesar, who desired to throw everything into confusion, a pretext for making war upon his native land. What else did Caesar say, what pretext did he offer for his absolutely mad design and deed except that the veto had been ignored, the tribunician prerogative annulled, Antonius curtailed of his rights by the senate? I refrain from saying how false and frivolous these pretexts were, especially since no excuse whatsoever can justify any man in taking up arms against his native land. But leave Caesar out of it: you at least must admit that your person constituted the occasion of that most terrible war. Oh you wretched fellow, if you realize this!” (*Phil.* 2.53 [Shackleton Bailey, LCL]).

find small details here and there which are unclear, incoherent, or both.³⁴ After questioning the locations and uses of Caesar's forces as Pollio reports them, they then examine the particular Greek terms Plutarch and Appian use to describe Caesar's forces and find certain ambiguities that frustrate explaining the size and makeup of the advance force Pollio reports.³⁵ Since it appears Caesar himself captured Ariminum, rather than accepted his advance force's capture of it, they argue, "The advance party whose dispatch would have involved enormous risks and which seems to vanish mysteriously from the face of the earth after leaving Ravenna, comes across also as curiously redundant, so much so that one is driven, ultimately, to question its existence."³⁶ Skepticism aside, in working through these issues it is clear Bicknell and Nielsen, with Frank, recognize the usefulness of verification tools like multiple and independent attestation and, to a lesser degree, material counter to expectation (or embarrassment).

Turning to Suetonius's version of the crossing, after summarizing the major and minor disagreements Bicknell and Nielsen conclude that Suetonius did not follow Pollio as his major source for CCR, but rather Livy.³⁷ One feature of interest in Suetonius's account is that Caesar lost his way to the river. They state, "That Caesar and his party should have got lost *en route* to their appointment with destiny is extraordinary, so extraordinary and unflattering, that it is difficult to believe that Livy, writing under the careful eye of Caesar's adoptive son, made such a story up."³⁸ With this very line of argument they imply the criterion of embarrassment. That Augustus was Livy's primary audience, Bicknell and Nielsen argue, served to check Livy against fabricating statements contrary to Caesar's (or Augustus') vanities and sentiments; such an embarrassing episode as Caesar losing his way and not being able to continue until a guide was found at dawn would therefore not likely have been included if it had no basis in what happened that evening. On balance they argue Pollio more likely omitted reference to losing his way because that would have reflected poorly on himself and Caesar.³⁹

Perhaps the most interesting feature in Livy (via Suetonius) is the appearance of the apparition to urge Caesar and his troops toward battle. Pollio (via Plutarch and Appian) omits any reference to the apparition. Although it

34 See the discussion in Bicknell and Nielsen, 144–47.

35 Bicknell and Nielsen, 145. This type of exegetical work has a clear counterpart in NT studies.

36 Bicknell and Nielsen, 146.

37 Bicknell and Nielsen, 148–51. Suetonius does cite Pollio in three other places in *Jul.* 30.4; 55.4; 56.4 (noted by Bicknell and Nielsen, 150n.28).

38 Bicknell and Nielsen, 151.

39 Bicknell and Nielsen, 151–52.

is possible Pollio included the figure (or even a figure like Patria in Lucan), Bicknell and Nielsen demur: "The formal possibility that Pollio mentioned the apparition, and Plutarch and Appian ignored the part of his account concerned, can be discounted. Apart from the improbability of both secondary writers passing over the same material independently, Plutarch's penchant for supernatural manifestations precludes his omission of a striking example."⁴⁰ Bicknell and Nielsen are justifiably suspicious that Pollio ever included such a figure in his telling of the crossing; by arguing against the probability of both authors independently omitting the same major event they implicitly acknowledge the value of independent attestation once again.⁴¹

Regarding the size of the Caesar's forces, Bicknell and Nielsen observe further discrepancies between Pollio and Livy. Pollio says Caesar used one legion whereas Livy speaks of five cohorts, or half a legion. Bicknell and Nielsen remark "We again find it difficult to believe that Livy would have departed so radically from statements of key participants in the events which he was relating, in the absence of what struck him as incontrovertible evidence that they were false."⁴² In other words, Bicknell and Nielsen argue Livy almost certainly had evidence he believed more accurately represented what happened than the account of Pollio. Here again Bicknell and Nielsen implicitly use a principle found in Langlois and Seignobos: material which runs counter to the author's "expectations and habits of mind" is that which is dissimilar to what he or she

40 Bicknell and Nielsen, 149n.25.

41 Suetonius unapologetically presents the apparition which interacts with and speaks to the soldiers. Bicknell and Nielsen reject attempts to dismiss the apparition's appearance: "The natural and immediate reaction is to diagnose a [literary] fabrication, contrived after the event in Caesarian circles for the purpose of insinuating that Caesar's invasion of Italy had supernatural encouragement and authorization. Such an appraisal, we believe, would be over-hasty and simplistic" (Bicknell and Nielsen, 152). They ultimately conclude the apparition was a ruse devised by Caesar to quell discontent among the ranks of Caesar's soldiers (152–56). This seems, to me, to be almost as extraordinary as an actual spirit's appearance.

Several authors discuss the apparition's literary role but give no consideration to the reality of such a being's appearance. Typical of this dismissal is Hohl who describes the *ostentum* in Suetonius as a "abgeschmackte Mirakelgeschichte" ("tasteless miracle story," 246). In his conclusion he advises "Man braucht nur das Mirakel und sein Drum und Dran zu eliminieren," presumably based solely on the miraculous nature of the apparition. French historian León Herrmann argues the Suetonian deity is most likely Apollo, noting particularly the deity's preferred instruments (a reed pipe for shepherding and a trumpet for making war), and the fact that "En fin, c'est un dieu protecteur de Jules César et surtout d'Auguste" (436).

42 Bicknell and Nielsen, 156.

under other circumstances would have anticipated⁴³ and therefore would not have expressed unless evidence or observation compelled the author to do so.

Bicknell and Nielsen accept Livy's reading and see three alternatives for why Caesar would have left half his forces behind when he invaded Italy. The first is that only five cohorts were ready when the senate decreed against Caesar and his tribunes fled Rome. This directly contradicts Caesar's own testimony (*B.C.* 1.7.8), for he had just recently readied the entire thirteenth legion. They admit Caesar is known to lie on other occasions,⁴⁴ but they rule out this option here: "it is surely out of the question that confronted with development of the greatest crisis of his career and the strongest probability that he would be compelled to resort to a military solution ... he should have failed to ensure appropriate disposition of his forces."⁴⁵ Here they reason based on what can be known of the general tenor of Caesar's character from elsewhere; this is functionally the criterion of historical coherence.⁴⁶ Based on what can be known about Caesar's character, Bicknell and Nielsen opt for the third alternative, that Caesar was unsure about five of his cohorts' willingness to follow him across the Rubicon. Regarding Caesar's omission of uncertainty about his troops' loyalty, Bicknell and Nielsen argue that "perceived reluctance on the part of five cohorts to follow him at such a crucial juncture, with his *dignitas*, career, and, ultimately, personal safety at stake, is something certainly that Caesar ... would have been deeply concerned to hide."⁴⁷

The second option for why Caesar left with half his forces depends on when he sent the other half to Arretium. Bicknell's and Nielsen's conclusions need not detain us for long since their methodology is our primary concern. Caesar claims he sent five cohorts to seize Arretium after the negotiations with Pompey failed (*B.C.* 1.11.4). Previous historians doubted the soldiers' abilities to easily and quickly cross the rugged, mountainous terrain between Arretium and Ariminum due to what can be known about the area in the winter

43 Langlois and Seignobos, "The fact was of such a nature that it would not have been stated unless it was true. A man does not declare that he has seen something contrary to his expectations and habits of mind unless observation has compelled him to admit it. A fact which seems very improbable to the man who relates it has a good chance of being true" (188). Above I likened this to the criterion of dissimilarity.

44 For Caesar's habit of self-justification, cf. Michael Grant, *Julius Caesar* (New York: M. Evans & Company, 1992), 101.

45 Bicknell and Nielsen, 157.

46 Cf. Martin Bloch's discussion of the French officer with a penchant for exaggeration in chapter 2: Bloch argues on the basis of corroborating evidence from the officer's other actions and interactions that the particular heroic deed in the officer's memoirs was likely a tall tale. Bloch, 111.

47 Bicknell and Nielsen, 159.

season;⁴⁸ thus it was argued the physical environment did not allow for what Caesar had claimed. Although disagreeing with the other historians on certain matters, Bicknell and Nielsen also mention the frozen terrain and the difficulty it posed for the soldiers. Here they operate with a particular manifestation of the criterion of coherence—again, corroborating with what can be known elsewhere—one that could more properly be termed a criterion of physical environment.⁴⁹

By reviewing the detailed discussion of CCR from historians Bicknell and Nielsen I have shown how this duo employed certain principles (or criteria) for verifying or questioning certain statements from ancient historians, as well as for arguing for the probability of their own reconstruction. They testified to the value of multiple and independent attestation when they cited Pollio and Cicero against Caesar. Referring to Caesar losing his way to the river they argued Livy would not have reported such potentially embarrassing material unless it were true, thereby appealing to a criterion of embarrassment. Their discussion of the terrain in January and, more significantly, what can be known about Caesar's character based on his actions and interactions elsewhere evince manifestations of what is essentially the criterion of historical coherence. It must also be noted that they are not dogmatic in their conclusions nor do they believe they have perfectly uncovered the events *as they really were*; instead, the criteria they seemingly employ enable them to assess more carefully historical probabilities.

Other historians treat CCR and utilize criteria similar to those delineated in chapter 2 and employed by Bicknell and Nielsen. What follows below is a representative sampling of modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity who treat this particular episode with a specific focus on their method for verifying or questioning certain statements in the ancient accounts and for arguing for the probability of their own reconstructions.

2.1 *Multiple and Independent Attestation in Modern Historians' Treatments of CCR*

To begin, Frank, whose work Bicknell and Nielsen cite, also applies the criterion of multiple and independent attestation. Referring to whether Caesar addressed his troops in Ravenna (before crossing the Rubicon) or in Ariminum

48 Matthias Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. Peter Needham, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 193; and Otto Eduard Schmidt, *Der Briefwechsel des Tullius Cicero von seinem Prokonsulat in Cilicien bis zu Caesars Ermordung* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893), 104–04 and 383–403, cited in Bicknell and Nielsen, 157n.47.

49 Compare with the criterion of Palestinian environment from chapter 2 above.

(afterwards), Frank discusses when the tribunes most likely left Rome and when they would have found Caesar; the timing of this event most likely determines when Caesar crossed the river. Frank concludes: "The strongest argument however lies in *the unanimous testimony* that Caesar addressed his soldiers at the beginning of his campaign,"⁵⁰ otherwise the address would have either made little sense or been of little use. The unanimous testimony to which Frank refers is the reports found in the primary sources which mention Caesar's pre-crossing deliberations.

Operating in the same vein is historian Robert Tucker who probes the historical value of Lucan's account. Tucker proposes "*investigating all the ancient records of Caesar's transit of the river and comparing them with Lucan's poetic version* with the intention of determining to what extent, if at all, the epic poet has based his report ... on historical fact."⁵¹ Although Lucan's account is epic poetry, it is appropriate to ask what source(s) Lucan used even if the answer turns out to be none. Romans of the Republican era had their own opinions on the relationship between poetry and history, and the most thorough discussions come from Cicero.⁵² Cicero believed poetry's primary aim was to entertain whereas historiography was concerned with the truth;⁵³ but concern for the truth did not inherently mean crudity of style. Lucan was likely aware of this connection with truth and style; although his highly stylized account of CCR embellishes much of what happened, there are nevertheless certain elements of the crossing which are undoubtedly based on historical fact. Tucker implicitly acknowledges this as he critically compares Lucan's account with

50 Frank, 224 (my emphasis).

51 Tucker, 246 (my emphasis).

52 Cf. Cicero, *De or.*, book 2; and the remarkable comment about the difference between historiography and poetry in *Leg.*

53 Modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity debate the precise notion of *veritas* in Cicero's statement. A. J. Woodman argues Cicero and other ancient historians did not believe truth (*veritas*) was the opposite of fiction, it referred more to bias, i.e. a historian should avoid bias toward one's subject (*Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies* [London: Routledge, 1988], 83 and n. 42). In the footnote just cited Woodman states "the ancients lacked our [modern] concept of 'historical truth.'" Dutch historian Daniël den Hengst believes Woodman correctly argues that in this context *veritas* more closely resembles bias, but he argues that elsewhere Cicero clearly uses *veritas* to mean "that which is in accordance with fact, the truth" (citing from the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *veritas*) ("Cicero and History," in *Emperors and Historiography: Collected Essays on the Literature of the Roman Empire* by Daniël Den Hengst, ed. J. A. van Waarden and D. W. P. Burgersdijk, Mnemosyne Supplements Monographs on Greek and Roman Language and Literature [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 15–26, at 18). Hengst also believes A. D. Leeman has thoroughly answered and refuted Woodman's argument (A. D. Leeman, "Antieke en Moderne Geschiedschrijving," *Hermeneus* 61 (1989): 235–41).

other independently generated sources, thus seeking multiple and independent attestation among the ancient sources.⁵⁴

In G. R. Stanton's discussion of CCR, he remarks on the problems with all the contemporary sources.⁵⁵ By referring to numerous sources for CCR, Stanton is seeking instances and statements of mutual corroboration, indicating his willingness to apply the criterion of multiple and independent attestation. Rondholz also observes several key motifs or elements in most or all the sources: Caesar's speed and the general order of events, as well as his hesitation at the river,⁵⁶ his pondering of the legal issues, and his sense of the peril he might bring to his country.⁵⁷ Here, Rondholz is operating with multiple attestation or, perhaps, recurrent attestation. Ultimately, by the use of the criterion of multiple and independent attestation each of these modern historians piece together a general picture of what happened when Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

The specific analyses in this section on multiple and independent attestation have thus far focused on particular instances where modern historians have explicitly and critically compared multiple sources to assess the historicity of

54 Tucker ultimately concludes there are three possibilities for Lucan's source: he invented it (so Bicknell and Nielsen, 164); he used Livy's lost book 109; or, he changed the source for Suetonius's positive apparition and presented a more negative "vision of his own composition more agreeable to Lucan's regular representation of Pompey as the champion of liberty and Caesar as the evil tyrant bent on destroying the Roman Republic" (248).

55 Stanton, 70. Stanton explains his method more fully: "The procedure followed, then, is to deduce, from passages in which Caesar is attempting to present his own position in a favourable light, admissions of political weakness and (from what riles him) its causes. In particular, we can tell a great deal about the legislation which had crucially affected Caesar's plans" (73). By critically comparing these passages, Stanton is employing the criterion of multiple and independent attestation or, perhaps more generally, the criterion of historical coherence. Cf. the discussion of problems in Wensler, 250: "Die Jahre des Bürgerkrieges zwischen Caesar und Pompeius—die Zäsur zwischen der römischen Republik und dem Principat—sind in den Quellen zwar verhältnismäßig gut bezeugt: den zeitgenössischen literarischen Quellen Caesar, Cicero, Sallust treten vielfältige historiographische Zeugnisse späterer Zeit an die Seite. Doch gerade die zeitgenössischen Quellen haben alle auch ihre problematischen Aspekte: die Hauptquelle, Caesars eigene Darstellung des Bürgerkrieges, wurde vielfach apologetischer Absicht verdächtigt und überführt, ja sogar von Geschichtsfälschung wurde gesprochen; die Briefe Sallusts sind von tagespolitischer Parteinahme gekennzeichnet und in ihrer Echtheit umstritten; Ciceros Korrespondenz macht nur allzu oft den Eindruck, die politischen Ereignisse zu kolportieren, nicht aber aus eigener Anschauung zu kennen."

56 Compare with Beneker who states the "imperial narratives, although different in many ways, all share at least one comment element, Caesar's hesitation at the river's edge" (75).

57 Rondholz, 447. This line of reasoning almost shades toward Allison's recurrent attestation (Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010], 20).

various statements regarding CCR. Clarity of method is a hallmark of scientific processes as Tucker, Gaddis, and other historians have shown,⁵⁸ and several of the historians above explicitly draw attention to their use of multiple sources. In her lively and detailed chapter on the civil war and Caesar's subsequent rule, the late Elizabeth Rawson clearly found multiple and independent attestation highly valuable for her reconstruction of the civil war. After briefly mentioning CCR she states, "For the events of the next weeks, we have Caesar's own account, which can occasionally be convicted by Cicero's correspondence ... of apologetic bias."⁵⁹ Tom Stevenson comments on the issues of writing Caesar's biography due to the nature of the primary sources in much the same way as Rawson.⁶⁰ Caesar was loved or loathed by his contemporaries, so that "the struggle to establish an authoritative interpretation of his career and personality began during his lifetime, and it has persisted down to the present day."⁶¹ Maria Wyke highlights the discrepancies between the accounts to focus on the literary roles of the apparitions (or lack thereof) which caused Caesar to waver at the river.⁶² Matthias Gelzer evaluates the different accounts in a footnote, noting how each source handles the timing of the consuls' arrival and Caesar's address to his soldiers, the position of the river, and what Caesar may have said when he crossed.⁶³ Adrian Goldsworthy works through the sequence of events in their most logical chronological order: Caesar watching gladiators and inspecting plans for a school, his evening at dinner and his early departure, and his arrival at the river, noting where the primary sources diverge. When Caesar left for the river Goldsworthy reconstructs the following scene:

According to Suetonius an element of farce entered the proceedings when Caesar and his carriage got lost in the darkness. ... Plutarch and Appian make no mention of this, and both state that he was already at Ariminum

58 See Tucker, 36–39, who speaks of shared cognitive values; Gaddis, 38, who also cites John M. Ziman, *Reliable Knowledge: An Exploration of the Grounds for Belief in Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 3; and see the discussion in chapter 2 above.

59 Elizabeth Rawson, "Caesar: Civil War and Dictatorship," in *The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146–43 B.C.*, 2nd ed., vol. x of *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 424–67.

60 Cf. Stevenson's first chapter, "The Influence of Julius Caesar in Western Culture," 1–14. For a different treatment of Caesar and his influence on Western culture, see the fascinating monograph focusing on the reception history of Caesar's personage and prestige throughout history in Wyke, *Caesar*, especially xi–x for a list of illustrations and photographs.

61 Stevenson, 5.

62 Wyke, 70–73.

63 Gelzer, 193n.3.

as dawn broke. Therefore at some early stage on the 11th [of January] he overtook the marching cohorts and came to the River Rubicon.⁶⁴

Goldsworthy is non-committal with certain matters (regarding Caesar losing his way to the river), but with others he respectfully demurs (when he later calls Suetonius' apparition a "tall tale"⁶⁵). Goldsworthy's implicit use of multiple attestation is evident. Similarly, in his popular-level biography of Caesar⁶⁶ Christian Meier only briefly indicates differences in the primary sources, opting not even to name Suetonius or Plutarch directly.⁶⁷ This hardly qualifies as a critical engagement of the primary sources, but later when Meier examines Caesar's dream of incest with his mother he treats Suetonius's and Plutarch's accounts much more closely.⁶⁸ As with Goldsworthy and the others above, Meier's approach underscores the value of multiple and independent attestation.

Not every modern historian of Greco-Roman antiquity (or Jesus researcher for that matter) reveals their precise method for assessing probabilities or verifying and refuting statements in historical sources when there are clear discrepancies in the primary sources. Most popular treatments of Caesar's life and times are troublingly obtuse in their treatment of events that are found in contradictory primary sources. In Grant's discussion of the beginning of the civil war, he glosses over the differences in the primary sources and gives no indication regarding the controversy surrounding where and when the tribunes met Caesar.⁶⁹ In an appendix Grant provides something of an annotated bibliography for his ancient sources, but only there does he finally mention the difficulty of wading through the often contradictory accounts.⁷⁰

64 Goldsworthy, 378.

65 Goldsworthy, 378.

66 By describing his biography as "popular" I do not intend to dismiss the underlying scholarship or Meier's erudition in anyway. I simply intend to point out this monograph has neither footnotes or endnotes, and there is no bibliography citing primary or secondary sources of any kind.

67 "According to one source [Caesar] lost his way in the dark; another states that he deliberately set off in a different direction, so that he would not be noticed when he turned south" (Meier, *Caesar*, 3).

68 "It is also in this period [i.e., his questorship in Hispania] that Suetonius places Caesar's dream of raping his mother. ... Plutarch, who places the dream in the night before the crossing of the Rubicon, may well have had better sources—at least for Caesar's recounting such a dream" (Meier, *Caesar*, 141).

69 Grant, *Caesar*, 94.

70 "There is no reliable surviving account of Caesar. To attempt to write one today means piecing together a mass of inadequate and often unreliable evidence from many sources" (Grant, *Caesar*, 163).

In summary, whether writing for a critical, academic audience or for a more general readership, every modern author cited in this subsection has relied on the multiple and independent attestation of the primary sources that mention CCR, and many refer to Cicero's correspondences and Caesar's account for additional corroborations (see the following subsection below). At times our authors' primary goal has been the critical comparison of the primary sources, as with Bicknell and Nielsen: they frequently cited this or that source to assess the probability of a given event. Other historians were less overt with their handling of multiple sources, but even in these instances (as with Meier) their use and critical assessment of multiple sources emerges nonetheless. In light of this regularly recurring methodological practice, there is simply no legitimate way to investigate CCR without engaging the sometimes contradictory primary sources; in fact, it is impossible to write critical historiography of CCR without employing the principle of multiple and independent attestation.

2.2 *Historical (or General) Coherence in Modern Historians' Treatments of CCR*

At times Bicknell and Nielsen referred to what could be known about Caesar or the cisalpine landscape based on corroborating evidence. I likened this line of argumentation to the criterion of historical coherence which, according to Gottschalk and others,⁷¹ emphasizes similarity of minutiae and other corroborating details rather than direct and explicit statements regarding a particular datum found in two or more independent sources. Bicknell and Nielsen cite Caesar's concern with his *dignitas* as a factor in leaving behind half his legion. According to Stevenson, *dignitas* "referred to a man's relative rank in society, i.e. his place on the social ladder in relation to his peers. [It was] one of the most cherished ideas for assessing a Roman noble's importance."⁷² Historian Frank Sirianni argues that Caesar's obsession with his *dignitas* was ultimately the key factor in his decision to cross the Rubicon, for by no other means could Caesar have capitalized on the greatness of his accomplishments. By citing other instances which corroborate Caesar's concern for his *dignitas*, Sirianni employs essentially a criterion of coherence with a focus on what can be known of Caesar's character from other sources or instances.⁷³ Goldsworthy also argues for the importance of *dignitas* to Caesar by referring to other instances in his political career where he was determined to preserve his *dignitas*, even

⁷¹ Cf. Gottschalk, 168.

⁷² Tom Stevenson, *Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 109.

⁷³ Sirianni, 636–38.

if it risked open war against Rome.⁷⁴ Klaus Bartels appeals to another aspect of Caesar's reputation, his propensity for risk, to argue for his reconstruction of what Caesar said as he crossed the river. As noted above the primary sources are split regarding whether Caesar stated the Latin indicative "The die is cast" (*iacta alea est*) in Suetonius or the Greek imperative ἀνεργίφθω (ὁ) κύβος "Let the die be cast" (Latin: *iacta alea esto*) in Plutarch and Appian.⁷⁵ Bartels argues the combined testimony of Menander's verse in context and what can be known of Caesar's reputation indicates the likelihood of the imperative as the original.⁷⁶ Christian Meier argues similarly based on what would be contextually appropriate: "The version 'the die is cast' is incorrect, for until then there had been no dicing. The game was just about to begin—the game of war. ..." ⁷⁷

On the basis of what can be known about the physical environment of cis-alpine Gaul during the winter season, Stanton argues the winter conditions made it impossible for the twelfth legion to have been on the other side of the Alps as some historians have suggested.⁷⁸ Along similar lines, Rondholz uses a criterion of coherence with what can be known of the geographical environment to evaluate the historical verisimilitude of a particular aspect of Lucan's account.⁷⁹ Observing how the poet has "styled [Caesar] a second Hannibal," Lucan recounts how melting snow from the Alps has dramatically swelled the river to extraordinary proportions. Rondholz demurs for "the origin of the Rubicon is located not in the Alps but in the Apennines, whose snow is not melted by south winds either in November or December. Hence the physical danger deriving from crossing the river is fictional: Lucan's Rubicon is adapted to the world of epic."⁸⁰ By appealing to what can be known about the local terrain and the river's source, Rondholz reduces Lucan's rushing river to a babbling brook.

Beneker employs the principle of historical or general coherence by focusing on the contribution a close reading of Cicero's works can yield for treating CCR. He notes:

74 Goldsworthy, 378–79.

75 According to Athenaeus, this particular line originates with Menander (Ath., *Deipnosophistae* 13.8, citing Menander's *The Arrephoros or the Pipe Girl*).

76 Klaus Bartels, "«Aufgeworfen sei der Würfel!» Caesars Ruf am Rubicon: «Alea iacta Est(o)!»,»" *AW* 38.5 (2007): 104.

77 Meier, *Caesar*, 4. Meier may not take into account the Romans' pervasive belief in fate, which would indicate the die's outcome was already determined; but Caesar may be suggesting he is master of his own fate here.

78 Stanton, 82.

79 Rondholz recognizes Lucan's account is not historiography but rather epic poetry (442).

80 Rondholz, 443–44.

Cicero does not mention the Rubicon or comment specifically on Caesar's transgression of the provincial boundary, but there is a cross-reference from Suetonius to Cicero that invites a comparative reading of the two authors. Such a reading ... encourages us to flesh out the angry yet principled response of Cicero, a response to which Suetonius directly alludes but the full implications of which he almost completely ignores.⁸¹

Cicero does not mention CCR, but based on Suetonius's use of Cicero and Cicero's statements in context one can more clearly understand Suetonius's depiction of Caesar.⁸²

In a brief study on Caesar's strategic movements, Thomas Hillman appeals to direct and indirect evidence to make his case. He cites Caesar and corroborating sources to argue "Caesar's passage of the Rubicon indicated a strategy of aggressive or forward defense rather than the first step of a plan for the immediate seizure of Italy and of absolute control of the Roman State."⁸³ The combination of these testimonies, according to Hillman, present the general impression that Caesar initially acted defensively, but they give no indication regarding Caesar's future actions.

Each of these particular arguments seeks incidental corroborations—information about a topic or a subject's character, customs, preferences, etc.—that can be known by recourse to other sources. Stevenson nicely summarizes the historian's task by describing the very principles of multiple attestation and general or historical coherence: "It is possible ... to read some of [Caesar's] writings, to read some writings about him, and to analyze archaeological and documentary sources, such as inscriptions and coins. The task becomes one of engaging with the evidence for Caesar's life, and of dealing sensitively with some of the major themes and biases of the source material."⁸⁴ To this end, by critically comparing Caesar's accounts with Cicero's, who also does not mention the river, a contemporary portrait of Caesar's character gradually emerges. Caesar throws caution to the wind like the gambler's dice and crosses the river to preserve his *dignitas*; his proclivity for safeguarding his honor becomes all the more apparent when one compares what other sources say about his concern for *dignitas* from other situations. Ancient sources treating Caesar also attest his reputation for recklessness and daring. Regarding what Caesar likely

81 Beneker, 75.

82 See Beneker, 76–85 for the full discussion. Beneker's method is most apropos for this study, not his conclusions.

83 Thomas P. Hillman, "Strategic Reality and the Movements of Caesar, January 49 BC," *Historia* 37.2 (1988): 248–52, at 252.

84 Stevenson, 5.

uttered, Bartels appealed to what would be contextually most appropriate and probable—thought not certain—to argue that Caesar stated the imperative “Let the die be thrown.” Turning from Caesar’s character to the physical environment, other modern historians argued the Rubicon’s winter conditions were not likely to sweep Caesar or his soldiers away in a rushing torrent of fresh snowmelt.

2.3 *Embarrassment and Dissimilarity in Modern Historians’ Treatments of CCR*

Bicknell and Nielsen noted how improbable it was that Livy fabricated material embarrassing to Caesar or that ran counter to his vanity (to use Langlois’ and Seignobos’ verbiage), referring specifically to Caesar losing his way to the river during the night.⁸⁵ I argued this was essentially the criterion of embarrassment. But not every historian dealing with CCR believes Caesar losing his way at night as trustworthy. Rondholz summarizes Bicknell’s and Nielsen’s position—i.e., that Livy would not have created an embarrassing episode for Caesar and so his nocturnal wanderings are likely true—but retorts that “Nicolaus of Damascus, however, another contemporary of Augustus, negatively portrays Caesar in order to enhance Augustus in his biography, so there is no reason why the same should not be true for Livy.”⁸⁶ In this particular instance Rondholz believes Livy has slighted Caesar to compliment Augustus, but dismissing Bicknell’s and Nielsen’s argument without further comment leaves something to be desired and so it would only be fair for her to argue her case beyond simple analogy. What she suggests is not impossible, but it strains credulity to think Augustus or his supporters would perceive the inclusion of such a minor detail as Caesar getting lost *en route* to the river as somehow enhancing Augustus’s prestige or reputation. Regardless, her critique justifies the caution urged by those historians who recommend this criterion.⁸⁷

In another instance, Stanton argues on the basis of embarrassment when he discusses Caesar’s statement at the conclusion of the battle against Pompey’s forces in Pharsalus: “This statement was recorded by C. Asinius Pollio, an adherent of Caesar and, after the latter’s death, of M. Antonius. *There can be no suggestion that this dictum was preserved by a source hostile to Caesar.* ... Caesar admits that he used his army against the commonwealth in 49 because

85 Cf. Bicknell and Nielsen, 151–52.

86 Rondholz, 440. For a fuller treatment of Augustus’s handling of Caesar’s memory, see Edwin S. Ramage, “Augustus’ Treatment of Julius Caesar,” *Historia* 34.2 (1985): 223–45.

87 Cf. Langlois and Seignobos, 186; and Shafer, 158.

otherwise he would have been condemned in the law courts.”⁸⁸ Such a self-condemning statement, coming from someone whom all historians agree was known to omit or falsify the truth in his favor, is therefore unlikely to be a fabrication. By noting how the initial source, Pollio, was favorable to Caesar, Stanton’s argument for the statement’s authenticity employs the criterion of embarrassment.

3 Conclusion for Methods of Verification for Caesar’s Crossing the Rubicon

After presenting and summarizing the primary sources for CCR, I demonstrated with particular examples how several modern historians have used various criteria for verifying and rejecting the historical accuracy of statements for the Rubicon crossing. Because Bicknell’s and Nielsen’s treatment was the most thorough, I used their discussion to establish a substantial, contextual framework for illustrating how other historians have utilized various criteria in their historiographic treatments of CCR, not unlike how I presented Langlois’ and Seignobos’ work at length in chapter 2 and built on that presentation with later historians’ discussions of method by noting points of agreement and disagreement when relevant. This inductive investigation into the method of modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity, though not totally comprehensive or exhaustive, has clearly indicated that these historians can and do employ criteria such as multiple and independent attestation and historical or general coherence (with literary sources and geographical features), and to a lesser degree criteria of embarrassment and counter-to-expectation (or dissimilarity). It should be increasingly clear that the criteria of authenticity known to NT studies are not, in fact, unique to Jesus research.

88 Stanton, 68–69 (my emphasis). Stanton offers the following translation of Caesar’s remarks: “They wanted it so. I, Gaius Caesar, in spite of such great deeds would have been condemned, had I not sought help from my army” (cf. Suetonius, *Div. Iul.* 30.4; Plutarch, *Caes.* 46.1). Stevenson recognizes the damning nature of the remark as well, noting “It would have suited Caesar, for instance, to blame the *optimates* in disgust after Pharsalus, portraying himself as the victim, rather than admitting personal responsibility for the scene of death before his eyes” (111).

Interdisciplinary Application of Authenticating Criteria and Further Implications

In 2016, Michael Licona raised the issue of the criteria's application and argued that certain criteria are inherent to historiographic research.¹ The methods espoused by general historians—including but not limited to authenticating criteria—and the philosophies of history and historiography are valuable disciplines with which, he observes, many historical Jesus scholars are woefully unfamiliar. A few of the contributors to Keith's and Le Donne's *JCDA* helpfully engage these issues,² thereby eliciting Licona's appreciation, but engagement even of this limited degree is the exception rather than the rule. With Jesus research in a(n apparent) sea change, some of the contributors to *JCDA* express grave pessimism concerning the criteria, calling for their total rejection due to their inability to deliver what they have long promised—authenticity of Jesus traditions.³ Licona believes such pessimism is unwarranted and questions the ability to pursue Jesus research without using at least certain criteria or tools for verifying statements about Jesus—the very point I have attempted to demonstrate. Taking Jesus's crucifixion and death as a case in point, Licona highlights the usefulness of both multiple attestation and embarrassment.⁴ Christian and non-Christian sources attest Jesus's crucifixion and death relatively soon

1 Michael R. Licona, "Is the Sky Falling in the World of Historical Jesus Research?," *BBR* 26.3 (2016): 353–68.

2 Keith and Le Donne, eds., *JCDA*. Much of the discussion on historiography in this volume is found in Jens Schröter's chapter, "The Criteria of Authenticity in Jesus Research and Historiographical Method," 49–70; to a lesser extent see Dagmar Winter, "Saving the Quest for Authenticity from the Criterion of Dissimilarity: History and Plausibility," 115–31. See Licona's summary and positive evaluation of certain chapters in "Sky Falling," 354–56.

3 From *JCDA*, see the following: Morna D. Hooker, "Foreword: Forty Years On," xiii–xvii; Rafael Rodríguez, "The Embarrassing Truth About Jesus: The Criterion of Embarrassment and the Failure of Historical Authenticity," 132–51; Dale C. Allison, "It Don't Come Easy: A History of Disillusionment," 186–99; and Chris Keith, "The Fall of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus: Concluding Remarks," 200–205.

4 Licona, "Sky Falling," 363–66. Cf. the fuller treatments on the resurrection in idem, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 303–18; "Jesus' Resurrection, Realism, and the Role of the Criteria," in *JSPH*, 285–302, on 298–302.

afterwards.⁵ Crucifixion was an utterly shameful manner of death in the Roman world and is thus the prime example of embarrassing Jesus traditions. Along similar lines, certain statements from Jesus also indicate his despair at his impending martyrdom. Licona rightly contends that Jesus research is impossible without some use of historiographic criteria like these, and so he issues the following challenge: "If a contributor [to *JCDA*] objects to my use of the criteria with respect to Jesus' death by crucifixion, I would want to ask that contributor whether he or she thinks Jesus was crucified and died as a result. If the contributor answers affirmatively, I would want to ask how that contributor arrived at that conclusion apart from the criteria."⁶

In this short test case Licona has applied multiple attestation and embarrassment, two criteria that general historians from the late nineteenth- to the early twenty-first centuries routinely cite as valuable for assessing the probability of a statement's facticity. Four broad criteria (or principles) that general historians consider valuable emerged from the review in chapter 2: multiple attestation, a criterion of general or historical coherence, a criterion of dissimilarity which can also be termed a criterion of "counter-to-expectation," and, closely related to this last one, a criterion of embarrassment. Despite certain similarities in nomenclature and function, these criteria espoused by general historians do not *perfectly equate with* the criteria that rose to prominence during form criticism's dominance in Jesus research. However, both collections of criteria are substantially similar in their rationales and their applications. Tom Holmén's discussion of the criteria's applications and rationales is therefore worth reviewing and comparing with what was said in chapter 2 about the criteria of general historiographic method.

For the criterion of multiple attestation, Holmén states the following rationale: "An attestation in two or more independent sources means that the tradition or motif in question is earlier than these sources. An early tradition or motif, again, has on average a greater probability of authenticity than a later one."⁷ The application follows: when an individual tradition or motif occurs in two or more independently generated sources, historians can regard the tradition in question as having a claim to authenticity. Langlois and Seignobos also discuss the stipulations for determining if a multiply attested fact is independent, noting that, if so, the fact has a higher probability of being historically

5 These sources include "annals, historiography, biography, letters, and tradition in the form of creeds, oral formulas, and hymns" (Licona, "Sky Falling," 364).

6 Licona, "Sky Falling," 365.

7 Holmén, "Authenticity Criteria," 49. Cf. idem, "Seven Theses on the So-Called Criteria of Authenticity of Historical Jesus Research," *RCaT* 33.2 (2008): 343–76, especially 361 and 367–70.

true.⁸ That being said, Ben Meyer “warns that these links should not be regarded as *guaranteed* in individual cases. Rather, they hold only with statistical generality.”⁹ Holmén later admits this criterion is weakened due to the Gospels’ clear literary interdependence. Although he only briefly mentions the use of the Pauline corpus and the Gospel of John as independent sources,¹⁰ the value of multiple attestation should be obvious when one considers traditions attested in these various sources¹¹ as well as in non-Christian sources.

Holmén’s rationale for the criterion of coherence is: “On the basis of what we already know about Jesus, this is what we would expect him to say or do.”¹² This criterion finds application when an individual tradition or motif coheres with what has already been deemed authentic by other means; it aims for corroboration of traditions. Multiple attestation and coherence are similar but their differences make a difference: “the criterion of multiple attestation does not require that one of the traditions has already been deemed authentic.”¹³ On the other hand, Holmén and others (see chapter 1) recognize that the coherence criterion can only operate by comparing material with traditions or motifs already deemed authentic by other means—it is necessarily a secondary criterion in terms of application, though not importance. The general

8 Charles Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. George Godfrey Berry (London: Duckworth, 1912), 199–204. See also Gilbert J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method*, ed. Jean Delanglez (New York: Fordham University Press, 1946), 308; Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Knopf, 1950), 166; Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 71–79.

9 Ben F. Meyer, “Objectivity and Subjectivity in Historical Criticism of the Gospels,” in *The Interrelations of the Gospels: A Symposium Led by M. É. Boismard, W. R. Farmer, F. Neirynck, Jerusalem 1984* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1990), 546–60, at 551 (my emphasis), in Holmén, “Seven Theses,” 369.

10 Holmén, “Authenticity Criteria,” 49.

11 A few recent contributions argue strongly for the value of the fourth Gospel for historical-Jesus study: Linda McKinnish Bridges, “Aphorisms of Jesus in John: An Illustrative Look at John 4.35,” *JSHJ* 9.2/3 (2011): 207–29; James H. Charlesworth, “The Historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: A Paradigm Shift?,” *JSHJ* 8.1 (2010): 3–46; “From Old to New: Paradigm Shifts Concerning Judaism, the Gospel of John, Jesus, and the Advent of ‘Christianity,’” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 56–72; Benjamin E. Reynolds, “The Johannine Son of Man and the Historical Jesus: Shall Ever the Twain Meet? John 9.35 as a Test Case,” *JSHJ* 9.3 (2011): 230–42; Paul N. Anderson, “The John, Jesus, and History Project and a Fourth Quest for Jesus,” in *JSPH*, 222–64; Kathy Ehrensperger, “At the Table: Common Ground between Paul and the Historical Jesus,” in *Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions*, 531–50; R. Riesner, “Back to the Historical Jesus through Paul and His School (The Ransom Logion—Mark 10.45; Matthew 20.28),” *JSHJ* 1.2 (2003): 171–99.

12 Holmén, “Authenticity Criteria,” 50. Cf. idem, “Seven Theses,” 361.

13 Holmén, “Authenticity Criteria,” 50.

historians reviewed in chapter 2 described a similar principle, one that I termed a criterion of general or historical coherence: the historian can regard a tradition plausible if it coheres with what can be known about the subject's customs, habits, affects, tendencies, etc., from other sources. The criterion of coherence employed by historical Jesus scholars and the criterion of general/historical coherence espoused by general historians therefore work essentially similarly. One point of difference that arose is the breadth of application of this criterion among general historians. General historians apply a principle of coherence not just to sayings from or traditions about their subjects but to geographical features mentioned in historical documents, e.g., thereby arguing on the basis of what can be known about a location's topography; historians of Jesus, on the other hand, tend to apply this criterion primarily to sayings and traditions.¹⁴

Regarding the rationale for the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity, Holmén explains: "The early Christians (i.e., the people behind the sources for Jesus) would probably not have devised notions about Jesus that they were not interested in or that they could expect to lead to trouble," and it is applied like so: "if a tradition passage or a motif can be seen to be in this way dissimilar to early Christian interests, its gain, success, views, practices and/or theological tendencies etc., it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity."¹⁵ Although Holmén is aware of the difficulties of dissimilarity to early Christianity, he nevertheless advises its careful use.¹⁶ Langlois and Seignobos argue similarly, noting that historians can reasonably expect to find a true statement where the author has reported something contrary to his or her expectations.¹⁷

For embarrassment, Holmén states the following rationale: "if the tradition or motif would seem to have been embarrassing to the early Christians,

14 If geographical features are under consideration, then these might apply under the Palestinian environment criterion Keener describes (*The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 157–58), but see Meier's concerns with this criterion (*A Marginal Jew*, 1:180).

15 Holmén, "Seven Theses," 357.

16 See Holmén's fourth (The Criterion of Dissimilarity is a Valid Tool of Authenticity and Has No More or No Greater Odds Against It than the Other Standard Tools Have) and fifth thesis (The Negative Application of the Dissimilarity Criterion Should Be Abandoned—even in Practice) in "Seven Theses," 356–67.

17 Langlois and Seignobos, 188. In their discussion it is clear that the statement that runs counter to the expectations of the author or audience is intended to present something as a fact; it is not a question of the author reporting what they have found and leaving final judgment to the reader/audience, as, e.g., Herodotus sometimes did (Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.24, 54–55, 149–52); in these instances, Herodotus offers his conjectures or several versions of an account. See also the discussion in Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1953), 121–22.

it can be regarded as having a claim to authenticity. Why? Because the early Christians would have not have created traditions about Jesus embarrassing to themselves.” Langlois and Seignobos espouse a substantially similarly criterion: “Is the fact stated manifestly *prejudicial to the effect which the author wished to produce*? Does it run counter to the interest, the vanity, the sentiments, the literary tastes of the author and his group; or to the opinions which he made a point of not offending?”¹⁸ Holmén argues embarrassment is a special case of dissimilarity—with some justification—and therefore believes there are no grounds for embarrassment to be its own criterion.¹⁹ He thus rejects embarrassment as a criterion in its own right, but nonetheless affirms its use as it is appropriately applied within the sphere of what would be dissimilar to early Christianity.

1 Analysis of Criteria Application from Chapters 3 and 4

The criteria of authenticity have been described positively as “the scientific tools of modern historical research,”²⁰ somewhat neutrally as “represent[ing] a form of historiography that is relatively unique to NT studies,”²¹ and negatively as “vehicles of subjectivity” that say more about the historian than the historical Jesus.²² Charlesworth once posed the question, can the myriad of Jesuses from Jesus research all be true?²³ Likewise, can each of these assessments of the criteria be true?

If there were to be any hope of recovering useful material for studying the historical Jesus, beginning in the mid-twentieth century²⁴ confidence in the tools for life of Jesus research necessarily soared to compensate for the lack

18 Langlois and Seignobos, 186 (my emphasis). See also Gottschalk, 161, but note the caution by Robert Jones Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3rd ed. (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1980), 158.

19 Holmén, “Authenticity Criteria,” 49.

20 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:1.

21 Stanley E. Porter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” *DJG* 2, 153–62, at 153.

22 Rafael Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria: The Use and Misuse of a Critical Method,” *JSHJ* 7.2 (2009): 152–67, at 157 and 167.

23 James H. Charlesworth, “Why Evaluate Twenty-Five Years of Jesus Research?,” in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 1–15.

24 For German scholars, anyway. See the discussion in Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*, JSNTSup 191 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 28–62, who argues convincingly that the “Quest” delineation of Jesus research wrongly favors a German perspective. Outside of Germany, NT scholars never stopped investigating the history of Jesus’s life and teaching.

of confidence in the sources.²⁵ Ample discussion on the criteria ensued with numerous studies detailing the nuances of the various criteria. The first real rumblings against the criteria, however, did not come until Morna Hooker raised a few concerns in the early 1970s, but these were merely tremors the full effects of which would not be felt until decades later when several others began to announce the crumbling of the criteria's foundations.

Pronouncements of the criteria's demise notwithstanding, the general consensus today is not so lopsidedly against the criteria;²⁶ many still find value in the standard criteria or in new expressions and combinations thereof. Despite deep and abiding differences in opinions on the criteria, however, what the overwhelming majority of scholars representing the three groups from chapter 1 do have in common is this: they have largely ignored how general historians practice their craft. This relative isolation from general historians and their methods is problematic, for are we not engaged in essentially similar pursuits? Above (chapter 1) I highlighted the rare instances when, in discussing the criteria, Jesus researchers meaningfully interacted with the methods of general historians. The purpose of chapter 2, then, was twofold: by surveying the methods for fact verification among other historians, 1) a conceptual and pragmatic methodological framework for the verification of "facts" (apparent or actual) in historical documents would become apparent so that 2) it could be shown how historical Jesus scholars' discussions of the criteria fit into this broader methodological context. It should be clear that certain criteria for authenticating statements in historical documents, certain principles enabling the historian to argue for historical probability, are common to both Jesus researchers and general historians. Despite the current controversy of using or not using the criteria in Jesus research, when raising the issue of the historicity of this or that tradition (the Gospels' trial narratives, in our case) it became clear in chapter 3 that, regardless of a scholar's opinions on the criteria, Jesus researchers repeatedly applied the criteria to adjudicate historical matters. In chapter 4

25 Holmén, "Authenticity Criteria," 43.

26 E.g., Jonathan Bernier, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus After the Demise of Authenticity*, Library of New Testament Studies 540 (London: T&T Clark, 2016), affirms the question of the criteria has been settled (1). Craig Keener, on the other hand, believes this is an exaggeration: "Certainly Bernier overstates the pervasiveness of this supposed consensus when he announces that 'The criteria of authenticity ... are now widely recognized as bankrupt historiographical instruments in need of serious revision if not outright repudiation'" (Craig Keener, Review of Jonathan Bernier, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus After the Demise of Authenticity*, Library of New Testament Studies 540 [London: T&T Clark, 2016] in *Biblical Interpretation* 26 [2018] 428–31, at 429).

we saw how modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity analogously applied similar methods as well.

In the following section I will critically examine the results of chapters 3 and 4—the use of criteria among Jesus researchers and modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity, respectively—to demonstrate how both groups use essentially similar criteria to essentially similar effect. My contention is this: principles like multiple attestation, general or historical coherence, and variations of dissimilarity²⁷ are inherent to historiographic research. Indeed, the very nature of *historical* Jesus research demands the careful and critical application of principles such as these in order to enable the historian to weigh historical probabilities to reconstruct as well as possible Jesus's life and teaching. After this examination, I will conclude with further implications for Jesus research. To summarize, I must state emphatically that the substantive overlap in the application of criteria-tools by Jesus researchers and general historians should put to rest two popular but wrong notions: 1) that the criteria “represent a form of historiography that is relatively unique to NT studies”;²⁸ 2) these tools can be marginalized or excised from Jesus research. While it is true the phrase “criteria of authenticity”—referring to a distinct collection of tools for assessing the historical authenticity of traditions Jesus and the early church—is unique to Jesus research, the practice of historiography represented by the application of multiple attestation, general and historical coherence, dissimilarity, and embarrassment fits neatly with the method of general historians.

1.1 *Multiple Attestation*

This is arguably the most prominent of all authenticity criteria, for no other criterion is as consistently applied by both historians of Jesus and general historians. Of all criteria, Brown employs this criterion more frequently than any other;²⁹ Fredriksen finds it useful, and Crossan makes it a staple of his method.³⁰ Regardless of one's stance on the usefulness of the criteria, multiple attestation is nearly universally applied.³¹

27 E.g., what is dissimilar, or counter-to-expectation, or what is embarrassing.

28 Porter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” *DJG* 2, 153.

29 Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Gospels*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 17.

30 John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), xxix–xxx, 372.

31 From chapter 3, see Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 303–04; E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 323–30; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 317; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 456; Gerd Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean: The Quest of the Historical*

Multiple attestation is frequently used for assessing the historical likelihood of Jesus's appearance before Pilate and his role in Jesus's execution. Allison is one of the most critical of the criteria today and yet he employs multiple, independent attestation (without naming it). The "passing references to [Pilate's] role in Josephus ... 1 Tim 6:13 ... [and] Tacitus ...," lead Allison to believe that "the Gospels surely are correct in having Pilate encounter Jesus, if only briefly."³² Keener argues similarly.³³ Additionally, despite the Gospels' confusion on who attended the Jewish trial of Jesus, Sanders observes the common thread is that the chief priests "constitute the one group which remains constant in the Gospels, and they also emerge from the pages of Josephus as the natural Jewish leaders and those who had the ear of the Roman rulers."³⁴ With the multiple and independent attestation of Pilate's and the chief priests' presence, Sanders later concludes "We must, I think, accept the view of the Gospels, at least in general terms. [Jesus] was executed by Pilate at the behest of the Jewish leadership, including at least the chief priests."³⁵ If historical information is to be found in the Gospels, surely there is a greater chance of finding it among multiply and independently attested traditions.

The historians who discussed CCR also applied multiple attestation in their reconstructions. When the primary sources differ (as do the Gospels' depictions of Jesus's trial), Bicknell and Nielsen employ multiple and independent attestation to argue for what was historically most probable. Although Caesar and Pollio were eyewitnesses to the river crossing, Pollio's account (if Pollio serves as Plutarch's and Appian's source) of Caesar driving his troops beyond Ariminum contradicts Caesar's. Because Pollio's and Cicero's accounts corroborate Caesar's movements against Caesar's own testimony, Bicknell and Nielsen argue Pollio's account is *probably* the more accurate³⁶—certainty, of course, is another matter.

Jesus in Narrative Form, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 189–91; Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 239; and Jens Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth: Jew from Galilee, Savior of the World*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Brian S. Pounds (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 184–85.

32 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 239.

33 Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1103.

34 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 317. Here Sanders applies multiple attestation and historical coherence; the latter is evident in Sanders's appeal to what Josephus says, i.e., Josephus's view of the chief priests' power coheres with what the Gospels present.

35 Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 318.

36 Peter Bicknell and Dana Nielsen, "Five Cohorts Against the World," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, 1x, ed. C. Deroux (Brussels: Latomus, 1998), 138–66, at 143.

Sanders believed the multiply attested picture of the Jewish leadership (and Pilate's involvement) presented a generally believable picture; in the same way, the use of multiple and independent attestation for Tucker, Stanton, and Rondholz enables them to piece together a general picture of what happened when Caesar crossed the Rubicon.³⁷ Whether at the level of fine detail or general overview, the historians I reviewed in chapter 4 repeatedly operate with multiply- and independently-attested traditions for their reconstructions.³⁸

For historians of Jesus and historians whose training and expertise lies beyond the NT, the criterion of multiple and independent attestation is the chief methodological cornerstone; indeed, no other criterion enjoys the same wide—if not universal—acceptance. For historians of all kinds, traditions that fulfill this criterion are not automatically guaranteed authenticity, and critical work remains to be done on multiply attested traditions.³⁹ However, the repeated attestation of independently-generated traditions nevertheless increases the likelihood of a tradition's authenticity.⁴⁰

1.2 *Coherence*

The criterion of coherence is closely related to multiple attestation—both seek corroboration of traditions. Multiple attestation can be applied when two or more sources affirm a datum. General or historical coherence, on the other hand, seeks a different quality of corroboration: e.g., if a person's actions or statements cohere with what can be known of or reasonably expected from that person, the historian has achieved not multiple attestation but a general degree of coherence. When historians Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff discuss the value of incidental details that corroborate previous knowledge, they

37 See the discussion in chapter 4, and in Robert A. Tucker, "What Actually Happened at the Rubicon?," *Historia* 37.2 (1988): 245–48; G. R. Stanton, "Why Did Caesar Cross the Rubicon?," *Historia* 52.1 (2003): 67–94, at 70–73; and Anke Rondholz, "Crossing the Rubicon: A Historiographical Study," *Mnemosyne* 62.3 (2009): 432–50, at 447.

38 See the conclusion of the subsection on multiple attestation in chapter 4: whether writing for a critical, academic audience or for a more general readership, every modern author cited in this subsection relies on multiple and independent attestation of primary sources, and many refer to Cicero's correspondences and Caesar's account for additional corroborations as well.

39 See, e.g., Grant's concerns about multiple attestation (Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels* [New York: Scribners, 1995], 201), but note also the lack of nuance in his discussion of multiple attestation and his application of multiple attestation (see above). Grant rightly highlights the necessity of determining the independence of accounts.

40 Cf. Langlois and Seignobos, 202–03.

describe what is essentially the criterion of historical coherence.⁴¹ Theissen and Winter's criterion of historical plausibility is truly a sophisticated and robust manifestation of general and historical coherence, and Bond uses this criterion frequently.⁴² The consistent application of general and historical coherence confirms that the criterion of coherence remains foundational to Jesus research.⁴³

Coherence works in a general way by highlighting historical verisimilitude. In chapter 3, the consensus on the Gospels' depictions of Jesus's trial was that they generally cohered with what can be known of similar types of trials from other historical sources, although considerable questions remain about the particulars. What precisely did Jesus say about the temple in the temple courts and would it have been threatening enough to merit his arrest? It is impossible to say with certainty, but Brown's treatment of Jesus's perceived or actual threat is representative of how many historical Jesus scholars employ coherence. When Jesus's mounting frustration toward religious authorities and institutions is set against a backdrop of heightened Jewish sensitivity toward protecting the temple from threats—especially from Roman meddling—the Jerusalem leadership was likely to take perceived or actual threats seriously.⁴⁴ A general picture of Jesus's trial and the chief priests' and Pilate's responses gradually emerges as traditions in the Gospels largely cohere with what can be reasonably expected based on other sources in history depicting trials like Jesus's.⁴⁵

41 Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 112. This type of circumstantial evidence is by no means totally reliable, but it can be quite useful.

42 Helen K. Bond, "At the Court of the High Priest: History and Theology in John 18:13–24," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S. J., and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2007), 323; idem, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 59; idem, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, SNTSMS 100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 197n.18.

43 The idea that Jesus as a historical person should fit within his socio-cultural and religious milieu assumes at least some degree of coherence. Cf. Charlesworth, "Why Evaluate ...?," *passim*; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 2; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 147; *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 132, where he posits a "similarity" criterion alongside dissimilarity.

44 Cf. Brown, 454–60.

45 E.g., Sanders believes Jesus's condemnation coheres with what historians could expect Jewish and/or Roman authorities to do to persons with comparable followings who were declared guilty of similar apparently (or actually) threatening public displays (*Jesus and Judaism*, 302–04). Allison argues that the Gospels may present a generally accurate

The discussion of coherence in chapter 4 demonstrated that historians of Jesus are not the only ones to apply coherence. Historians like Bicknell and Nielsen, Stevenson, Sirianni, and Goldsworthy essentially argue that a portrait of the historical Caesar gradually emerges, depicting a man with extraordinary concern for (or obsession with) his *dignitas*—a concern that coheres with what can be known of Caesar from primary sources.⁴⁶ Also on the basis of coherence with what can be known of Caesar's reputation, Bartels and Christian Meier argue for the likelihood of Caesar uttering "Let the die be cast" rather than "The die is cast" as Caesar crossed the Rubicon.⁴⁷

Coherence, of course, is no guarantee of historical certainty. Brown rightly cautions that this criterion must "be used with extreme care since coherence could explain why the incident was imaginatively created."⁴⁸ But corroboration does lend a degree of verisimilitude and probability, and these are the general aims of the historian, not perfect certainty.

1.3 *Dissimilarity and Embarrassment*

Dissimilarity is a useful criterion when applied with great care. Brown urges that historians ought to allow for their subject's creativity,⁴⁹ and Theissen speaks of Jesus's general dissimilarity with early Christianity.⁵⁰ Keener argues for only the positive use of dissimilarity,⁵¹ but some use it negatively. Both positive and negative applications were seen in chapter 3. Positively, Brown observes the dissimilarity from early Christianity in the title "King of the Jews" and, coupled with its multiple attestation in the Gospels, Brown concludes there is a "high probability" that Jesus was crucified on this charge.⁵² Crossan largely doubts the historicity of the trials; citing Donahue, Crossan believes that Mark has invented the first hearing before the Jewish leadership, arguing that "Mark's juxtaposition of the witness of Jesus in 14:64 with the denial of

picture due to the coherence of certain gospel traditions with what can be known about Roman execution from other sources (*Constructing Jesus*, 235).

46 Bicknell and Nielsen, 159; Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar: The Life of a Colossus* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 378–79; Frank A. Sirianni, "Caesar's Decision to Cross the Rubicon," *L'Antiquité Classique* 48.2 (1979): 636–38; Tom Stevenson, *Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 109.

47 Klaus Bartels, "«Aufgeworfen sei ser Würfel!» Caesars Ruf am Rubicon: «Alea iacta Est(o)!»,» *AW* 38.5 (2007): 104; Christian Meier, *Caesar: A Biography*, trans. David McLintock (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 4.

48 Brown, 18.

49 Brown, 19.

50 Theissen, *Shadow*, 188.

51 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 156–57.

52 Brown, 476.

Peter in 14:66–72 is a graphic demonstration of the twin options confronting persecuted Christians.”⁵³ Relying implicitly on the negative use of the criterion of dissimilarity to early Christianity, Crossan argues the initial hearing is not historical because it reflects a later period when Christians were faced with fidelity or apostasy.

Although a movement in Jesus’s name grew and later developed after his death, a similar movement did not rise after Caesar’s death; perhaps for this and other reasons the criterion of dissimilarity did not emerge as prominently among the modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity in chapter 4.⁵⁴ This is not to say that general historians do not find dissimilarity valuable, for Michael Grant praises the criterion of dissimilarity in his treatment of Jesus’s life and teaching. He applies dissimilarity negatively at least twice, once to argue that Mark’s report of Jesus’s reference to a future glorious appearance is “implausible, reflecting the exalted reverence the early Church felt for his divinity,”⁵⁵ and again to say that the extraordinary degree of Pilate’s vacillation regarding Jesus was designed to heighten the Jews’ responsibility for Jesus’s death.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Lane Fox applied dissimilarity positively: given Christian interest in the Gentile mission, Lane Fox believes the Gospels’ depiction of Jesus avoiding predominantly Gentile cities may reflect historical tradition.⁵⁷

In the test cases above we observed Jesus researchers and general historians positively and negatively applying dissimilarity. The negative applications by Crossan and Grant excised certain traditions for being too similar to early Christian interests. On the other hand, positive applications led Brown and

53 John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 45, citing John R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), 239.

54 Caesar did not found a lasting religious or philosophical movement that attracted many, and so despite his own writings he is not the source of teachings that were transmitted, developed, and reapplied over time by his followers. Intrinsically, then, historians apt to apply the criterion of dissimilarity have less reason to do so on Caesar’s life and writings. On the other hand, a situation comparable to finding the historical Jesus in the Gospels exists for historians who attempt to disentangle the historical Socrates from his student Plato. Nothing written by Socrates himself is extant, but he is considered the founder (or at least at the source) of a great philosophical tradition. Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, who believes it is possible, despite great difficulty, to find the voice of Socrates in the mouth of Plato (Guthrie, *Socrates* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971], 1–57).

55 Grant, *Jesus*, 159.

56 Grant, *Jesus*, 163.

57 Cf. Robin Lane Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 283–85.

Lane Fox to conclude the likelihood of historical information regarding certain traditions.

The criterion of embarrassment features prominently in discussions on the trial narratives, particularly regarding Jesus's crucifixion by the Romans. From chapter 3, Crossan was the most skeptical about finding historical information in the Gospels, and yet he argues "I take it absolutely for granted that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Security about the *fact* of the crucifixion derives not only from the *unlikelihood that Christians would have invented it* but also from the existence of two early and independent non-Christian witnesses to it."⁵⁸ Similar statements on the unlikelihood that Christians would have invented Jesus's crucifixion that would embarrass or shame them can be found in Keener, Fredriksen, Sanders, Theissen and Merz, Bond, and Schröter.⁵⁹ Brown also argued it was unlikely for Christians to have invented a predication of Jesus indicating the temple's destruction while Jesus was dead and the temple stood⁶⁰—i.e., why invent a saying that appears to run counter to your group's protagonist and interests; for this reason the differences in what Jesus is supposed to have said likely stem from the evangelists' attempts to reckon with a difficult saying, not from Christian invention.

Despite the value many Jesus researchers place on embarrassing traditions, some urge caution in applying this criterion. According to Brown, embarrassment is potentially valuable but he admits that "one must always allow that it could have been useful to develop [an embarrassing tradition] ... as a theological illustration."⁶¹ Allison is even more skeptical of embarrassment: "We must face the surprising fact that all of the supposedly embarrassing facts or words are found in the Jesus tradition itself. This means that they were not sufficiently disconcerting to be expurgated."⁶² Allison seems to imply a truly embarrassing tradition would have been removed; since some supposedly embarrassing facts remain, then, they must not have been too embarrassing after all, hence this criterion is dubious. But Brown makes an astute and valuable suggestion for determining what could have been embarrassing: "Determining what was

58 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 372 (original emphasis on "*fact*"; my emphasis on "*unlikelihood*").

59 Cf. Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 303, 318; idem, *John*, 1104; Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 97; E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Press, 1993), 259; Sanders and Davies, 315; Theissen and Merz, 458; Bond, *Pilate*, 198; and Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 180.

60 Brown, 457.

61 Brown, 18.

62 Dale C. Allison, "How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity," in *HSHJ*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3–30, at 5–6.

embarrassing in the [passion narratives] becomes less subjective if we begin with items fastened on by Jewish or pagan polemic against the plausibility of Christianity. The flight of the disciples, denials by Peter, betrayal by Judas, and Jesus' prayer for deliverance were all objects of scorn in such polemic."⁶³ Grant's argument from the excursus in chapter 3 is worth revisiting:

the evangelists manifestly *do* include some unpalatable or even incomprehensible doings and sayings of Jesus, and incidents in his life. They include them because they were so indissolubly incorporated in the tradition that their elimination was impracticable; in other words, because they were genuine.⁶⁴

The free creation of self-detrimental, public facts is extraordinarily unlikely; they are more likely rooted in historical tradition than in early Christian creativity.

Arguing for either the genuineness of an embarrassing tradition or the creation of an embarrassing tradition is not unique to Jesus research. Several of the historians in chapter 4 discussed the potential for embarrassment in CCR. Bicknell and Nielsen argued it was unlikely that Livy fabricated Caesar losing his way to the river during the night for this would have embarrassed Caesar, the adoptive father of Augustus (and Livy's patron).⁶⁵ Rondholz, on the other hand, argues that Livy has likely created this tradition in order to praise Augustus.⁶⁶ Rondholz's argument is weak;⁶⁷ more importantly, though, she dismisses not the validity of embarrassment in general, only its application in this instance. Stanton argued for the authenticity of Caesar's admission that he used his army against the republic because he would have been condemned had he not held on to his army.⁶⁸ Since all modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity agree Caesar was known to omit or falsify the truth in his favor, a confession of this nature is therefore unlikely to be a fabrication.

63 Brown, 18n.25.

64 Grant, 183 (original emphasis).

65 Bicknell and Nielsen, 151–52.

66 Rondholz, 440.

67 Recall from chapter 4 that Rondholz compares Livy's style of reporting with that of Nicholas of Damascus: "Nicolaus of Damascus, however, another contemporary of Augustus, negatively portrays Caesar in order to enhance Augustus in his biography, so there is no reason why the same should not be true for Livy" (Rondholz, 440). It is unconvincing to argue that Livy has created an embarrassing tradition simply because Nicholas of Damascus has done so.

68 Stanton, 68–69 (my emphasis).

Both historical Jesus scholars and general historians apply a criterion that argues for the historical likelihood of traditions that are reported despite their potential to embarrass or shame either the protagonist, the author, the author's group, or any combination of these. Jesus researchers can find a criterion essentially similar to their criterion of embarrassment within general works on historiographic method and in more focused studies like the ones reviewed in chapter 4. Historians of Jesus and general historians, then, apply virtually the same criterion of embarrassment in practically the same ways.

To summarize: at the levels of methodological theory and practical application, Jesus researchers and general historians—particularly including modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity—employ essentially similar criteria-tools. The criteria, therefore, do not represent a method that is relatively unique to NT scholarship.⁶⁹ Regardless of the subdiscipline, then, the application of certain principles or criteria is inherent to historiography.

2 Some Further Implications

The criteria are applied to argue for what is essentially the historicity of a given tradition; this is evident in the pragmatic overlap between the terms “authentic” and “historical” as recent NT scholars have often use these terms. In Allison's, Rodríguez's, and Keith's work, these authors tend to treat “authentic” and “inauthentic” as synonyms for “historical” and “unhistorical,” respectively. Allison describes three categories of material the criteria can give: secondary or redactional (i.e., not historical); almost certainly historical; and “possibly authentic,” meaning somewhere between the former and the latter.⁷⁰ “Authentic” here indicates that which is rooted in Jesus's life and teaching, i.e., historical. Keith and Rodríguez sometimes speak of authentic traditions as those which can be connected to the historical Jesus.⁷¹ Keener and Evans, to provide two examples of those who still see value in the criteria, use

69 Pace Porter, “Criteria of Authenticity,” *DJG* 2, 153.

70 Allison, “Marginalize,” 11–12.

71 Cf. Keith, “Memory and Authenticity,” 155; and Rodríguez, “Authenticating Criteria,” *passim*. But at other times “authenticity” seems to mean something else for Rodríguez. In a discussion about the NT presentations of Jesus, Rodríguez claims “The most important thing we can say about memory, then, is that we need to get away from an either/or approach to memory and authenticity: *either* an event happened *or* it didn't. There are multiple ways to recount the past; in fact, there are multiple ways to recount the past authentically” (*Jesus Darkly* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2018], 158). Using the story of how he and his wife started dating, he comments “the truth is that ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ are irrelevant categories for judging the differences between our stories” (*Jesus Darkly*, 158).

“authenticity” similarly as well.⁷² Porter explicitly states this connection with authenticity and the historical Jesus: “By authentic is meant material that is thought to have originated with Jesus, or come as close as one can legitimately determine using the means at our critical disposal.”⁷³ Despite strong disagreements on the value of the criteria, there appears to be substantial agreement in the connection of authenticity with historicity. The criteria are historiographic tools and therefore they purportedly aid in determining the probability of a given tradition’s historicity.⁷⁴ If the criteria are designed to assess the likelihood of historicity (authenticity), is marginalizing or rejecting the criteria of authenticity ultimately an attempt to reject the notion of historicity? Some argue the notion of authenticity inherent to the criteria approach—and espoused by form critics—is ultimately wrongheaded.

2.1 *Are the Criteria of Authenticity Guilty by Association with Form Criticism?*

For almost a decade Keith has been a leading voice in rejecting the criteria, arguing that the supposition that one can separate authentic gospel traditions from the inauthentic—or the historical from the unhistorical—stems from the form-critical approach to the Gospels.⁷⁵ He has received considerable

Rodríguez’s argument may be weakened, however, if one opts to speak of “historicity” criteria.

- 72 Keener, *Historical Jesus*, 154–55; Craig A. Evans, “Authenticating the Activities of Jesus,” in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 3–29.
- 73 Stanley E. Porter, “The Criteria of Authenticity,” in *HSHJ*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Tom Holmén, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1:695–714, at 695.
- 74 Cf. the discussion of historicity and its connection with authenticity in Robert L. Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, WUNT 1/247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 9–93, especially 55–56. Webb arrives at a similar conclusion as Allison, Rodríguez, Keith, Keener, Evans, and Porter. Based on the discussion of the criteria in Webb (60–75) he lands in the “critical but accepting category.”
- 75 Licona likewise remarks, “We can observe a few of the essays [in *JCDA*] suggesting the criteria are outdated because they were initially developed for use within a form-critical methodological framework,” (Licona, “Sky Falling?” 359). Elsewhere Keith states, “For both Hooker and me, the criteria approach’s indebtedness to form criticism is a damning one that inhibits the criteria approach from delivering the ‘authentic’ tradition it claims to deliver” (Keith, “The Indebtedness of the Criteria Approach to Form Criticism and Recent Attempts to Rehabilitate the Search for an Authentic Jesus,” in *JCDA*, 25–48, at 48). Cf. Chris Keith, “Memory and Authenticity: Jesus Tradition and What Really Happened,” *ZNW* 102.2 (2011): 155–77, especially 155–65. Rodríguez concurs, “Historians of Jesus never should have turned to isolating historical data apart from the larger historical

pushback,⁷⁶ but in fairness to Keith his argument is more nuanced than some have claimed: “*contra* Hägerland,” for example, “I have never argued that every individual criterion of authenticity grew directly from form criticism.”⁷⁷ The major target of Keith’s criticism is the form-critical model of authenticity and *not* criteria per se:⁷⁸ “As should be clear, then, *my argument was not and is not against ‘criteria’ in a general sense of methodological principles—for I am not advocating a methodological free-for-all—but specifically against the concept of ‘authenticity’ and the tradition model for the Jesus tradition that generates it.*”⁷⁹ The tradition model in question, he argues, arose from form criticism:

As *the* dominant method in New Testament scholarship at the time, form criticism was obsessed with reconstructing something “behind” the written Gospels. That something was the oral tradition, which had started as pristine in the early church but through constant preaching in different circumstances had, like a snowball going downhill, rolled along through the years and picked up layers of ecclesiastical theology. ... Form critics wanted to get past, through, or around that later theology and to the earlier state of the tradition. They thus reconstructed the oral tradition by first and foremost trying to eliminate from the Jesus tradition

representations of which those data are a part” (Rodríguez, “Embarrassing Truth,” 147). Allison likewise asserts, “Running units through the gauntlet of the traditional criteria presupposes that there is a clear distinction between what is authentic and what is not, which is a very misleading proposition” (Allison, “It Don’t Come Easy,” 196). At the risk of pedantry, the very fact that criteria are mustered to distinguish the historical from the unhistorical plainly implies there is, in fact, not a “clear distinction between what is authentic and what is not.” On the other hand, the belief that one can separate the historical (authentic) from the unhistorical (inauthentic) is by no means exclusive to form criticism, for criteria-based approaches to historiography that assume the historian can differentiate to any degree the historical from the unhistorical were fully developed by historians without any influence from form criticism; Langlois and Seignobos, Bloch, Garraghan, Gottschalk, Howell and Prevenier, Tosh et al were never form critics.

76 Two critics Keith addresses are Tobias Hägerland, “The Future of Criteria in Historical Jesus Research,” *JSHJ* 13.1 (2015): 43–65; and Ernest van Eck, “Memory and Historical Jesus Studies: Formgeschichte in a New Dress?,” *HvTSt* 71.1 (2015): 1–10. See Chris Keith, “The Narratives of the Gospels and the Historical Jesus: Current Debates, Prior Debates, and the Goal of Historical Jesus Research,” *JNT* 38.4 (2016): 426–55, at 431 where he refers to “a related misrepresentation” of his work by Hägerland.

77 Keith, “Narratives,” 430. Cf. Chris Keith, *Jesus Against the Scribal Elite: The Origins of the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 74, where he recognizes “certain aspects of the criteria approach’s internal logic go back to well before the nineteenth century. ...”

78 Chris Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee*, Library of New Testament Studies 413 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 47.

79 Keith, “Narratives,” at 429 (my emphasis).

the influence of the Gospel authors. At its core, therefore, form criticism believed the written Jesus tradition in the Gospels was fundamentally bifurcated—some arose from the past behind the texts and could be recovered; some arose from the present circumstances of the Gospel authors and had to be bypassed. Implicit is the important assumption that scholars can identify which traditions belong in which pile and separate them accordingly.⁸⁰

For Keith, the major problem with the criteria approach is the false hope it gives Jesus researchers of identifying which traditions can be excised.

Keith resolutely rejects the criteria, then, as a “methodological means of identifying ‘authentic’ Jesus tradition and separating it from ‘inauthentic’ Jesus tradition, categories that correspond roughly to the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.”⁸¹ What Bultmann and other forms critics sought to do through form criticism is virtually the same task as twenty-first-century scholars who apply the criteria, according to Keith: form critics sifted through the later accretions by early Christians to arrive at an unmediated Jesus, while proponents of the criteria employ these tools to sift through later traditions to arrive at the Jesus of history. He thus objects to this apparent “substitution of the historical Jesus for the pre-literary tradition.”⁸² Elsewhere Keith aptly summarizes the problem: viewing the Jesus researcher as a scientist using the criteria-tools to extract authentic traditions from their obtrusive, theological framework (i.e. the Gospels) “reflects the *historical positivism* of the modern era. This point is crucial for why Jesus studies not only did change in light of postmodern historiography but had to change.”⁸³ In a postmodern approach to historiography, the interpretations, those theologically-informed and -shaped memories of Jesus present in the Gospels, are the historian’s only connection to Jesus; to strip away or get behind these links is to remove the sole means of access to Jesus.

80 Keith, *Scribal Elite*, 75–76.

81 Keith, “Memory and Authenticity,” 161.

82 Keith asserts “... it is worth considering once more Bultmann’s definition of the historian’s task according to form criticism—‘to separate the various strata in Mark and to determine which belonged to the original historical tradition and which derived from the work of the author.’ The striking similarity is clearest in the respective definitions of the historian’s task as beginning with separation of the written tradition. The criteria approach to the historical Jesus mirrors the form-critical approach to the pre-literary Jesus tradition so much so that the former has simply exchanged ‘the original historical tradition’ in Bultmann’s quotation for ‘the historical Jesus.’” (“Memory and Authenticity,” 163, citing Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1963], 1). See Keith’s full argument on 155–65.

83 Keith, *Scribal Elite*, 76 (my emphasis).

These memories cannot, therefore, be divided into authentic and inauthentic “precisely because, in memory, the past is always packaged in interpretive frameworks borrowed from the present” and present needs irrevocably shape memories of the past.⁸⁴ Therefore, Keith maintains,

Either one should dispense with the theological interpretations in the narratives of the Gospels in order to reconstruct critically the past, or one should begin with these theological interpretations as the crucial links to the past; either the first step in the historical task is away from the interpretations in the available sources or towards them in an effort to account for them. But it cannot be both.⁸⁵

Keith presents a dire situation, but are the criteria really guilt by association with form criticism?

The criteria of authenticity in life of Jesus research undoubtedly developed within form criticism, but several of the standard criteria originated prior to form criticism (as Keith rightly notes above). Theissen and Winter conclusively demonstrated that the criterion of dissimilarity arose and developed well before the advent of form criticism, and Porter has shown the same to be true for other criteria as well.⁸⁶ General historians also described the principles on which some of the criteria existed before the advent of NT form criticism, and essentially similar criteria have existed and been in operation among general historians for over a century. For Keith, the criteria remain guilty by association with form criticism, because inherent to the criteria is form criticism historical-positivist paradigm.⁸⁷

84 Keith, “Indebtedness,” 39.

85 Keith, “Indebtedness,” 47.

86 Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 16–17; see also 261–316. Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, 65. Compare his stance in 2000 with his more recent position in “The Criteria of Authenticity,” in *HSHJ*, 2:694–714, where he states: “As this essay illustrates, I wish to modify my position somewhat, recognizing that the criteria reached their highpoint in the form-critical period, even though many of them were developed before then” (697n.5).

87 Keith states “the criteria approach assumes that the interpretations of Jesus in the written tradition derive from later early Christian communities or elsewhere, but not from the life of the historical Jesus. This position may not always be explicitly stated as such, but it is *certainly implicitly asserted* insofar as the criteria of authenticity, particularly the criterion of dissimilarity, pass(es) as authentic only those traditions that can be detached from early Christian (and first-century Jewish) identity,” (“Memory and Authenticity,” 162–63, my emphasis).

2.2 *The Criteria Approach and the Social Memory Approach: Similar Aims and Tools?*

For Keith, the criteria falter because they “all operate under the general method of using a criterion to ‘authenticate’ particular sayings or actions of Jesus. The criteria approach therefore also *remains firmly entrenched in form criticism’s historical-positivist program* of attaining objective historical data detached from interpretation/theology.”⁸⁸ The last sentence most succinctly captures the problems Keith sees with the criteria. Against the criteria and the positivist model of authenticity, Keith and others have championed an approach rooted in social memory theory.⁸⁹ Social memory has irrevocably shaped every tradition; there is *no* pristine historical kernel that has not already been interpreted within the Gospels. Accordingly, the belief in a pristine historical kernel—not to mention the search for such a kernel—is rooted in a fundamentally flawed approach to historiography.

Keith concludes a 2016 article by differentiating the two approaches: the criteria approach,

which came to a particularly forceful and lasting expression in the period of Bultmann and his followers and assumed form criticism’s understanding of the transmission of the Jesus tradition, views the historian’s task as building a historical Jesus from individual units of gospel tradition that have been broken from the narratives of the written gospels. In this model, the kerygmatic narratives of the gospels are a hindrance that scholars must get ‘behind’ in order to reach the historical Jesus. The second model, which has come to a particularly forceful expression in the work of scholars employing social memory theory or postmodern theories of history, views the historian’s task as proposing a historical narrative that explains how early Christians came to conceptualize Jesus in the ways that they did and generates theories of the historical Jesus on the basis of that process. In this model, the narratives of the gospels are an indispensable aid that scholars must embrace as the primary means by which one can discuss an unattainable actual past.⁹⁰

88 Keith, *Scribal Elite*, 77 (my emphasis).

89 Cf. Keith, “Memory and Authenticity,” 165–76; Cf. Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 50–70; “Indebtedness,” 202–03; “Narratives,” 441–50. For studies on social memory proper as well as its connection with Jesus research, see Keith’s extensive bibliographic footnotes in *Jesus’ Literacy*, on 50–56.

90 Keith, “Narratives,” 450.

According to Keith, the social memory (or Jesus-memory⁹¹) approach supersedes the criteria approach because the former values the narratives of the Gospels as the main point of departure—the “indispensable aid”—for historiographic explanations for how early Christians came to present Jesus as they did, whereas the latter sees the early-Christian depictions of Jesus in the narratives of the Gospels as obstructions that need to be removed in order to present and understand the historical Jesus.

The social memory approach therefore seeks to explain the causes that underlie the memory-effects now present in the Gospels. Keith denies the criteria approach is capable of getting *behind* the text to an unmediated, historical Jesus rather than the theological Christ; however, based on Keith’s statement above the social memory approach uses the Gospels as the starting point for the historian to “propos[e] a historical narrative that explains how early Christians came to conceptualize Jesus in the ways that they did,”—in other words, to offer their own explanations of what causes and memories (effects) lurk *behind* the gospel narratives.⁹²

Proponents of a purely social memory approach (who concurrently reject the criteria) may protest this comparison with form criticism, but the two approaches are in reality more similar than not. In a section titled “The Jesus-Memory Approach and the Gospel Tradition” from Keith’s 2011 monograph, he explains how the social memory approach rejects several assumptions of the criteria approach, namely “that scholars can separate the Jesus tradition into authentic and inauthentic bodies of tradition. *This claim is not, however, the same as claiming that scholars cannot make judgments about which traditions are likely historically accurate and which are not.*”⁹³ He reiterates this point at the bottom of the same page: “Worth repeating once more is that *this position is not a denial that scholars can discuss what may have happened in the actual past of Jesus.* Rather, it is a denial that one can get closer to that reality by dismissing the interpretations of Jesus in the written tradition.”⁹⁴ Further still, within a subsection titled “The Historian’s Task according to the Jesus-Memory Approach,” Keith quotes Schröter approvingly, “Every approach to the historical Jesus *behind* the Gospels has to explain how these writings

91 Keith, “Memory and Authenticity,” 165; Cf., *Jesus’ Literacy*, 50.

92 Keith, “Narratives,” 450, beginning with “The second model. ...”

93 Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 65 (my emphasis). For the section “The Jesus-Memory Approach and the Gospel Tradition,” see 50–68. It is important to keep in mind that Keith uses “authentic” and “inauthentic” as synonyms for “historical” and “unhistorical” (see above).

94 Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 65 (my emphasis).

could have come into being as the earliest descriptions of this person.”⁹⁵ Later, Keith summarizes his argument for this section: “Cumulatively, then, *the Jesus historian must*, in light of the various claims about Jesus preserved in early Christian commemoration, *posit an actual past that best explains the existence of the Jesus-memories* in light of the contexts of remembrance in early Christianity.”⁹⁶ He concludes his section on methodology with this: “Another analogy might be helpful. In many respects, the Jesus-memory approach to the historical Jesus provides a means for Jesus historians to approach the actual past in the manner that text critics approach variant readings, by positing as original the reading that best explains the others,”⁹⁷ after which he cites Metzger’s and Ehrman’s joint volume on textual criticism as an example of the kind of educated conjecturing he envisions.⁹⁸ Finally, in Keith’s own analysis of claims regarding Jesus’s scribal literacy, he remarks “the historical task starts with the claims in the sources [i.e., the Gospels]; the socio-historical context then provides the primary background for the scholar’s conclusions concerning which claims have the greatest likelihood of historical accuracy, and for what reasons.”⁹⁹

I have presented Keith in his own terms at length, carefully providing the context of the quotations above in order to avoid the charge of misunderstanding and misrepresentation.¹⁰⁰ It is undeniable that he, in fact, does believe historians can make judgments about which traditions are more or less likely historically accurate. Despite Keith’s claims of the incompatibility of the social memory approach’s and the criteria approaches’ epistemologies and methods, however, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these approaches are essentially similar: the historian seeks to peer behind the text¹⁰¹ and, on the basis of evidence and inference from what can be known of the socio-historical context, to conjecture a plausible theory to account for the memories in the

95 Jens Schröter, “The Historical Jesus and the Sayings Tradition: Comments on Current Research,” *Neot* 30.1 (1996): 151–68, at 153 (my emphasis), in Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 66. Curiously, Keith appears to approve of Schröter’s talk of getting “behind” the Gospels.

96 Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 67 (my emphasis).

97 Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 67.

98 Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 300, cited in Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 67.

99 Keith, *Jesus’ Literacy*, 168.

100 Keith complains multiple times that his critics have misrepresented him (“Narratives,” 430–32, 435). I present his views as charitably as possible, attempting to avoid misrepresentation of his thorough and erudite work.

101 For the language of getting *behind* the text, cf. Schröter, “Historical Jesus,” 153, and Keith’s apparent approval of this language in his citation of Schröter in *Jesus’ Literacy*, 66.

text. Paul Foster has also highlighted the similarity between form criticism and memory studies with regard to the transmission models assumed by form critics and social memory theorists:

Social memory as articulated by professional academics in the area of memory studies has a striking similarity to the perspectives of the early form critics. That is, any underlying historical connections have either been subsumed or heavily transformed to serve contemporary community needs. Thus the reshaping of traditions functions to create a social memory that addresses community concerns, and the task of reconstructing the historical reality behind these reformulated memories may be unachievable due to the degree of mutation that past events have undergone in the service of contemporary needs.¹⁰²

If Foster is correct, the social memory approach may be ultimately untenable. The question naturally arises, then: By what means, by what principles of argumentation, logic, or (to use a loaded term) criteria, can a historian judge a tradition to be more or less likely historically accurate? Licona raised essentially the same question in 2016: “If a contributor [to *JCDA*] objects to my use of the criteria with respect to Jesus’ death by crucifixion, I would want to ask that contributor whether he or she thinks Jesus was crucified and died as a result. If the contributor answers affirmatively, I would want to ask how that contributor arrived at that conclusion apart from the *criteria*.”¹⁰³ To further this argument, if the criteria are totally rejected, then what of the facts which are established on the basis of the criteria, e.g., Jesus’s multiply attested and embarrassing crucifixion? Do we dispense with the category of “fact” altogether?

Those who wish to jettison the criteria in favor of a social memory approach—rather than embracing the best of both approaches¹⁰⁴—have

102 Paul Foster, “Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research,” *JSHJ* 10.3 (2012): 191–227, at 197. Foster goes on to compare the two approaches: “there has been a noticeable tendency to castigate the form critics of a previous generation for their skepticism concerning the reliability of remembered traditions. However, when one compares the form critics’ handling of traditions with the way contemporary psychologists discuss the concept of memory, while there are differences in terminology, both approaches agree that the remembered event functions within communities to promote group values and that the connection between past events and the social remembrance is often quite slight” (202).

103 Licona, “Sky Falling,” 365 (my emphasis).

104 Cf. Paul N. Anderson, who acknowledges the value of memory studies and advocates for the use of inclusive criteria (“The John, Jesus, and History Project and a Fourth Quest for Jesus,” in *JSPH*, 222–64).

not taken seriously enough Holmén's argument that the traditional criteria can operate without form critical underpinnings.¹⁰⁵ It is also untenable to argue the criteria of Jesus research are hopelessly ineffective due to their prior relationship with form criticism, for generations of general historians have espoused essentially similar tools with not so much of a hint of form criticism lurking in the background. General historians of the late twentieth century who evince a more critical realist approach to historiography likewise recommend criteria-tools akin to those within Jesus research.

Keith claims he is not rejecting careful methodology in general but the criteria as applied with form-critical—i.e., historical-positivist—assumptions about authenticity; for Keith, the problem with the criteria is intrinsically epistemological, for he does not believe they are capable of yielding the knowledge that their proponents believe they can yield. Strangely, then, Keith appeals to text-critical criteria as a potentially fruitful option,¹⁰⁶ but one wonders if Metzger and Ehrman offer truly viable options that social memory theorists would find acceptable. Metzger and Ehrman present the following criteria (their word) as general principles to follow in the practice of textual criticism: first, "choose the reading that best explains the origin of the others"; and second, "the reconstruction of the history of a variant reading is prerequisite to forming a judgment about it." External evidence considers the witness's date, its geographical distribution, and the familial relationships of witnesses. Internal evidence involves two kinds of probabilities:

Transcriptional probabilities consider scribal tendencies: i) generally, the more difficult reading is preferable; ii) generally, the shorter reading is preferable; iii) given the scribal tendency to harmonize divergent passages, in parallel passages the verbally dissident reading is preferable; iv) scribes tended to smooth awkward grammar or peculiar phrasing, and substitute less common words with more common synonyms.

Intrinsic probabilities consider what an author was more likely to have written: i) style, vocabulary, and theology; ii) the passage's context; iii) coherence with the author's use elsewhere; iv) Jesus' Aramaic heritage; v) Markan priority; vi) "the influence of the Christian community upon the formulation and transmission of the passage in question."¹⁰⁷

105 Tom Holmén, "Seven Theses on the So-Called Criteria of Authenticity of Historical Jesus Research," *RCT* 33.2 (2008): 343–76.

106 Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 67.

107 Cf. Metzger and Ehrman, 300–04.

It is important to note that Metzger and Ehrman warn that not all of their criteria are applicable in every case; it is therefore incumbent upon the textual critic to discern when to employ one test or another.¹⁰⁸ If it is true that not every criterion is applicable in every situation for textual critics, it is worth considering if the same is true for the criteria of authenticity since both text critical criteria and the criteria of Jesus research are designed for evaluating a reading's or a tradition's probability of authenticity. In his denouncement of the criteria, one of Allison's seven propositions is that "if the criteria point in different directions for the very same unit, then they are just not reliable indicators."¹⁰⁹ This complaint sounds reasonable except that it begs the question: does Allison really believe *every* criterion is applicable to the same tradition? No competent historian argues that every test of historicity is always applicable—and Allison is undeniably a competent historian—so his proposition is bewildering. If text critics can urge caution and discernment in determining which particular criterion is applicable, surely it is also reasonable for historians to urge caution and discernment in determining which particular criterion is applicable for a given tradition.

Keith rightly observes the similarities among the first general principle of textual criticism and the social memory approach: the reading that best explains the others is, *mutatis mutandis*, akin to the process of proposing a historical narrative that best explains the Jesus-memories in the Gospels. But the principles underlying the standard criteria are evident in the method of textual critics as well. In Metzger's criteria for evaluating external evidence, multiple attestation clearly emerges: "The concurrence of witnesses, for example, from Antioch, Alexandria, and Gaul in support of a given variant is, other things being equal, more significant than the testimony of witnesses representing but one locality or one ecclesiastical see. On the other hand, however, one must be certain that geographically remote witnesses are really independent of one another."¹¹⁰ By arguing in favor of a particular variant due to the presence of multiple, independently-generated witnesses that attest that particular

108 Metzger and Ehrman, 304.

109 Allison, "Marginalize," 13.

110 Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 3rd corrected ed., (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), xxv. The same criterion appears in another discussion of external evidence: "In evaluating the evidence, the student should begin with external considerations, asking which reading is supported by the earliest manuscripts and by the earliest type of text. Readings that are early and supported by witnesses from a wide geographical area have a certain initial presumption in their favor" (Metzger and Ehrman, 305–06).

reading, Metzger is appealing to the rationale that forms the basis for the criterion of multiple and independent attestation in historical-Jesus study.¹¹¹

Additionally, the similarities between what Metzger's and Ehrman's intrinsic probabilities seek and what the criterion of general/historical coherence seeks are striking: for textual criticism, these considerations depend on what can be known of the author's habits, customs, and preferences from elsewhere; historical/general coherence can likewise help the historian determine the plausibility or probability of a given tradition by comparing what can be known about a particular subject with what other sources indicate regarding the subject's character, customs, and preferences. If Keith is right to appeal to textual critical method for a historiographic model, the principles underlying the standard criteria are clearly intrinsic to textual critical method as well as historiographic method.

3 Further Discussion of the Criteria by Historical Jesus Scholars

In 2019 several authors vigorously affirmed the standard criteria are inherent to historiography.¹¹² In Licona's essay, he once again stresses the value of multiple attestation and embarrassment, as well as a criterion of early attestation.¹¹³ Craig Evans and Greg Monette demonstrate how multiple attestation and embarrassment come to bear on Jesus's burial. The Gospels' presentation of Jesus's burial achieve what they term "verisimilitude," which "asks if the material reflects the realities of the time and place it alleges to depict. Does the source speak of real people, real places, and real events as they are known from other sources, including the findings of archaeology?"¹¹⁴ This criterion seeks for corroborations with what can be known about the subject, geographical

111 In a separate study, Ehrman applies this logic to a variant in Mark: "Most commonly [the variant in question] is explained that the shorter reading was created by accident: because the words Χριστοῦ and θεοῦ end in the same letters (-ου), a scribe's eye accidentally skipped from one to the other, leading him inadvertently to leave out the intervening phrase. But this view short-circuits on several grounds. It is made somewhat unlikely by the occurrence of the shorter reading in a range of textual witnesses that are early, widespread, and unrelated," (Bart D. Ehrman, "The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froehlich on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 19–31, at 27).

112 Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski, eds., *JSPH*.

113 Licona, "Role of the Criteria," 298–302.

114 Craig A. Evans and Greg Monette, "Jesus' Burial: Archaeology, Authenticity, and History," in *JSPH*, 269–84, at 279.

features, local customs, etc. from other sources; it is essentially what I have termed the criterion of general or historical coherence. On the basis of verisimilitude Evans and Monette argue that despite Jesus's shameful (and by way of implication, embarrassing) crucifixion, his burial in a known location reflects historical practice.¹¹⁵ It is also refreshing to see Evans and Monette refer to two general historians' works on historiographic method.¹¹⁶ Daniel Wallace works through a series of textual variants to show how "early scribes were occasionally embarrassed at material in the Gospels to the extent that they altered the text. And their embarrassment in the least comports with the view that the latter evangelists were indeed somewhat embarrassed by—or at a minimum—found difficult some of what they read in Mark."¹¹⁷ On Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin, Darrell Bock carefully applies multiple attestation and the criterion of rejection and execution. Bock further—and rightly—argues that these two criteria, though valuable, operate effectively only as components of a broader and more robust historiographic method.¹¹⁸ To evaluate the probability of Jesus's trial and the charge of blasphemy, Bock presents how "at least in this case [regarding the charge of blasphemy], beyond any criteria, which only brings us into the field of play for the discussion, *the cultural and historical background yields far more detail*";¹¹⁹ this is akin to what I have termed the criterion of general or historical coherence. Through the remainder of his essay Bock brings cultural and historical backgrounds to bear with essentially the same effect as Evans's and Monette's concept of historical verisimilitude. Each of these authors, dealing with one or several criteria, affirm the criteria's value but, at the same time, caution that the criteria in and of

115 Evans and Monette, 279–83; *pace* Crossan, *Cross*, 248.

116 Evans and Monette, 273, citing from Louis Gottschalk, "The Historian and the Historical Document," in *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology*, ed. Louis Gottschalk, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Robert Angell, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1945), 1–75; and Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method*. A similar discussion can be found in Webb, "Historical Enterprise," 12–38.

117 Daniel B. Wallace, "Textual Criticism and the Criterion of Embarrassment," in *JSPH*, 93–124, at 103. See 103–23 for Wallace's main argument. Wallace responds directly to Rodríguez's "Embarrassing Truth" on 100–01. Metzger and Ehrman also mention the presence of "evident infelicities" that were later corrected (275). Ehrman argues similarly for different variants in his "Text of Mark." The connections between textual criticism and the standard criteria (see above) are further strengthened in these works.

118 Darrell L. Bock, "A Test Case: Jesus' Remarks Before the Sanhedrin: Blasphemy or Hope of Exaltation," in *JSPH*, 205–21. He states: "My position is that a criteria-like approach is not the be-all and end-all for Jesus studies, but that it is *an important and useful component* in such a study," (207, my emphasis).

119 Bock, "Test Case," 201 (my emphasis).

themselves are insufficient to serve as the *only* tools of historiographic method for Jesus research. On this basis, Licona recommends, "Rather than jettisoning the criteria, a better route may be to admit that one's expectations of the criteria have been idealistic and then revise those expectations accordingly."¹²⁰

The analysis in chapter 3 demonstrated that not just proponents of the criteria use the criteria but also scholars in the "marginalize or reject" category. Above, Allison's, Schröter's, and Bond's application of the criteria on Jesus's trial became evident despite, for example, Allison's claims "to explicate [his] conviction that we can learn some important things about the historical Jesus *without resorting to the standard criteria*."¹²¹ Having argued elsewhere for the abiding presence of memory and on the basis of the *recurrence* of various motifs in the extant Jesus tradition, Allison notes that historians of Jesus generally accept the genuineness of Jesus's "kingdom of God" sayings, his use of "father" for God, and a number of other traditions; he thus quips, "It is in favor of what I am saying that scholars often conduct business as though what I am saying is true."¹²² Earlier in the same chapter, Allison confesses his work with the criteria has led him to separate material into three categories: material that is obviously "secondary because [the traditions] are redactional or clearly contain post-Easter convictions"; "almost certainly historical"; and mostly "neither obviously of pre-Easter origin nor obviously post-Easter fictions."¹²³ Allison believes traditions in the second category are "almost certainly historical either because Paul and the Gospels agree on the point ... or because church invention is wildly implausible."¹²⁴ Allison does not name the criterion of multiple attestation but he has clearly used it to argue that the traditions in category two are "almost certainly historical." Furthermore, as Allison develops

120 Licona, "Role of the Criteria," 297–98. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 451.

121 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 10 (my emphasis).

122 Allison, "Marginalize," 25. The recurrence of these traditions and activities leads Allison to conclude, "This is not a question exactly of multiple attestation—a particular saying or event being attested at least more than once in more than one source—but rather of recurrent attestation, by which I mean a theme or motif that is repeatedly attested throughout the tradition. Surely this is why we are confident that Jesus spoke about God as 'father' and of the eschatological utopia as 'the kingdom of God'" ("Marginalize," 25).

123 Allison, "Marginalize," 11–12. Allison argues similarly in *Constructing Jesus*, 21–22.

124 Allison, "Marginalize," 11. Allison gives two examples of the Gospels agreeing with Paul: the prohibition of divorce (1 Cor 7:10–11) and the instruction for missionaries to earn a living by serving for the gospel (1 Cor 9:14). Allison finds it "wildly implausible" the church would have invented the accusation that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard (cf. Matt 11:19//Luke 7:34).

his principle of recurrent attestation, he examines the recurring eschatological motifs associated with Jesus's death.¹²⁵ Considering Allison's critiques of multiple attestation,¹²⁶ it is worth quoting him directly: "Given its *multiple attestation* in Paul, the synoptics, and John, the habit of associating the end of Jesus with eschatological motifs must go back to very early times."¹²⁷ For Allison, this multiple attestation does not necessarily indicate historicity but he has clearly argued for antiquity which, naturally, increases the probability the motifs in question originate with Jesus. Similarly, multiple attestation arises in Schröter's work: "Sources that provide information about the historical Jesus consist of those witnesses that have preserved historically usable information and are not, in turn, dependent on older sources."¹²⁸ In the ensuing discussion, Schröter examines traditions in Paul, the Gospels, and John in order to determine the earliest traditions available. On Jesus's baptism by John, Schröter recognizes the great difficulty this posed for the early church and, on the basis of this potential for embarrassment, he remarks "the reports about John and Jesus are based on an important historical event: the encounter with John is the first historically certain event of the life of Jesus."¹²⁹ Despite their criticisms of the criteria, multiple attestation and embarrassment nevertheless emerge.

In 2011 Keith argued that despite a trajectory in the Gospels that Jesus was scribal-literate, he was most likely scribal-illiterate.¹³⁰ How does Keith arrive at this conclusion? First, he correctly affirms that Jesus's socio-historical context is not determinative, it is rather informative.¹³¹ In light of Jesus's socio-historical background, in which the vast majority of persons were scribal-illiterate, it is more historically likely that "Jesus was a scribal-illiterate teacher not simply because most people were scribal illiterates, but because the sources have conflicting claims and the socio-historical context suggests that one of those claims (scribal illiteracy) has a far greater likelihood than the other (scribal literacy)."¹³² Keith continues, noting that it is far more likely that "Jesus-memories in the

125 Allison also briefly treats the recurring theme of Jesus's defeat of evil and the presence of Peter at key points in Jesus's ministry ("Marginalize," 22–24) as examples of recurring attestation.

126 Allison, "Marginalize," 7.

127 Allison, "Marginalize," 28 (my emphasis). Here, it seems as if Allison combines multiple attestation with an implicit criterion of early attestation; on early attestation, compare with Licona, "Role of the Criteria," 299–300.

128 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 22.

129 Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 85–86.

130 Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*.

131 Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 168.

132 Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 168–69.

early church developed in a more explicitly scribal direction."¹³³ The reason? As the early church continually interacted with broader Greco-Roman culture, Christians were increasingly likely to improve Jesus's reputation as a teacher by remembering him as scribal-literate. In a footnote, Keith admits his argument is essentially that early Christians were *embarrassed* about Jesus's scribal illiteracy and therefore increasingly had reason to present him as more literate than he actually was.¹³⁴ Recognizing the potentially embarrassing position this might put him in, Keith assures his audience that his argument "is not against the usefulness of social factors such as embarrassment in understanding the interpretations of Jesus that exist in the early sources. Rather, it is against the idea that scholars can bypass those interpretations and access authentic Jesus tradition, whether by means of embarrassment, dissimilarity, or other methods."¹³⁵ The problem for Keith is that he does precisely what he claims he is not doing: to argue against the historical likelihood of Jesus's scribal literacy, Keith ultimately bypasses Luke's interpretation of Jesus as the scribal-literate teacher (Luke 4:16–20) and instead favors Mark's (implicit) depiction of Jesus—the scribal-illiterate τέκτων (Mark 6:3)—as the historically more likely presentation. Keith expounds on this particular argument later in 2016, "I have, for example, found the notion that early Christians could have been embarrassed about various issues concerning Jesus to be useful in narrating a possible historical development. ... The important point, however, is that I do not believe the concept of early Christian embarrassment to be a means of dispensing with Christian interpretations and directly accessing the actual past."¹³⁶ There are not many scholars today who, by using the criteria, believe they can directly access the actual past.¹³⁷ But "narrating a possible historical development" inevitably means that one bypasses an early Christian interpretation. According to Keith, in order to engage in historiographic reconstruction the historian must argue which tradition-interpretation is more likely historically accurate and in this case Keith has ultimately dispensed with the historical memories in Luke's interpretation. Despite his efforts to explain away his application of the criterion of embarrassment, Keith has implicitly applied

¹³³ Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 169.

¹³⁴ Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 169n.16. The argument continues on 169–70.

¹³⁵ Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, 169n.16 (continues to 170).

¹³⁶ Keith, "Narratives of the Gospels," 449.

¹³⁷ Despite John Meier's confidence in the criteria, he emphatically argues that historians cannot directly access the actual Jesus (*Marginal Jew*, 1:21–31). Cf. Keener, *Historical Jesus*, xxxiv; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 2. See also the comparable sentiments in Schröter, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 9.

this principle to the same effect as others who accept the criteria approach. Lastly, the criterion of general and historical coherence is evident throughout Keith's presentation of Jesus as a scribal-illiterate teacher as Keith argues on the basis of historical verisimilitude.

4 Final Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

The state of the criteria of authenticity in historical-Jesus study today is hotly debated, but three broad reactions typify the responses to the criteria. General historians spanning the twentieth century recognize certain principles for evaluating the historical probability of facts (real or apparent) in historical documents, and these principles substantially cohere with the standard criteria found among historians Jesus (chapter 2). The criteria were applied by Jesus researchers' reconstructions of Jesus's trial(s) regardless of one's predisposition to the criteria (chapter 3). Using Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon as a test case, I demonstrated how modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity applied multiple attestation, coherence, and a counter-to-expectation (embarrassment) criterion to assess the historical probability of certain traditions in the divergent, extant primary sources (chapter 4). By comparing the application of the criteria among Jesus researchers and modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity, I showed how both groups of historians employ essentially similar criteria to essentially similar effect. Additional analysis of recent works from those who accept and those who marginalize/reject the criteria further indicated the criteria's inherence to historiography (chapter 5). To borrow a line from Dale Allison, it is in favor of what I am saying that others conduct business as though what I am saying is true.

4.1 *Upcoming Trends and Suggestions for Further Research*

Modernism and postmodernism have lurked in the background for much of the discussion;¹³⁸ for some, the criteria represent a modernist, historical-positivist approach, whereas the social memory approach happily embraces certain aspects of postmodernist historiography. The social memory approach

¹³⁸ A brief and helpful survey of postmodern historiography can be found in Beverly Southgate, "Postmodernism," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 540–49; cf. Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 420–25; Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 1–12. Cf. Paul Foster, "Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: An Ongoing Conversation with Stan Porter and Hughson T. Ong," *JSHJ* 12.1/2 (2014): 165–83, at 172.

currently applied by Jesus researchers appears to operate with a soft postmodernism, not the extreme forms thereof that deny the past is ever knowable. Although Jesus researchers of differing presuppositions recognize the validity of some of the challenges raised by postmodern critics, radical forms of postmodernism have been adequately answered by general historians.¹³⁹ While radical postmodernism has failed to win the day among general historians, it remains to be seen if, in their continued attempts to refute the criteria approach, Jesus-memory theorists will drift into increasingly extreme degrees of postmodernism. These conversations will likely continue, and further discussions of epistemology and methodology will be necessary.¹⁴⁰

Although the social memory approach is growing in popularity, the majority of currently available studies on the historical Jesus still employ the criteria approach to varying degrees; this is not surprising since the social memory approach to Jesus research is still a recent development when compared with the several decades the criteria predominated. A perennial complaint against the criteria of authenticity is that they have not yielded a scholarly consensus.¹⁴¹ If the social memory approach comes to predominate Jesus research to the degree that the criteria approach did, should we expect a consensus to emerge (finally) in life of Jesus research from the social memory approach? Time will tell.

Some historians of Jesus find value in the criteria as one element of a broader historiographic method.¹⁴² Charlesworth helpfully recommends combining the best of old and new methods.¹⁴³ Returning to an issue raised in chapter 1,

139 See the discussion in Licona, *Resurrection*, 71–93.

140 Cf. the critiques of postmodern epistemology applied to biblical texts in Ben Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 435–37. Elsewhere, Witherington correctly affirms that epistemology inherently involves certain *a priori* assumptions about reality (idem, *Torah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018], 379).

141 Cf. Allison's critique in "Marginalize," 9. On the other hand, John Meier's reflection is apropos: "That the use of criteria has not resulted in worldwide scholarly agreement on the historical Jesus will surprise only those who are also surprised by the fact that more than a century of minute study on the Synoptic Gospels has not led all scholars to adopt a single solution to the Synoptic Problem" (Meier, *Marginal Jew*, v:17).

142 Cf. Bock, "Test Case," 27; despite his concerns regarding the criteria, see also Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2009), 87–91, who confesses that he finds some value in the criteria provided they serve as one component of a more robust method.

143 Charlesworth, "Why Evaluate ...?," 4–6 (subsection "Improved and Increased Methodologies"), and 10–13 (subsection "The Inclusion of Topography and Archaeology"). See also the several essays in section 2 "Archaeology and Topography: Perceiving Jesus in His World" in *Jesus Research: New Methodologies and Perceptions*, 103–97. Claussen's work on

the progress of Charlesworth's Jesus Research project and similar studies will be augmented by further, substantial dialogue with general historians who, like Jesus researchers, operate with textual, archaeological, and linguistic data;¹⁴⁴ greater interdisciplinary discussion of methods for verifying historical claims will be increasingly valuable to historians of all subdisciplines. To this end the aim of this study has been to offer an interdisciplinary analysis of authenticating criteria with the hope that others may build profitably on these foundations.

I selected Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon because the event in question is extant in multiple and independent sources, and the crossing is comparably distant in history as is Jesus's trial(s). Additional test cases to determine if and/or how general historians apply certain criteria on historical events may corroborate or refute the conclusions in this study; e.g., the events surrounding Otho's short reign as emperor reported in Suetonius, Tacitus, and Plutarch, or the variations in different versions of the same event from Plutarch's *Lives* could provide modern historians of Greco-Roman antiquity opportunities to engage in the same kind of comparative analysis from chapter 3.¹⁴⁵ In the excursus at the close of chapter 3, I provided an additional example of historians' methods, and there the criteria emerged as well, further indicating that authenticating criteria are inherent to historiography. Despite claims of their demise, then, the criteria may yet rise up to outlive their pallbearers.

archaeology and the Gospel of John shows how archaeological evidence (at least occasionally) corroborates John's knowledge of Jerusalem and Palestine ("Turning Water to Wine," *Jesus Research: An International Perspective*, 73–97).

144 Cf. the several helpful essays in David B. Small, ed., *Methods in the Mediterranean: Historical and Archaeological Views on Texts and Archaeology* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

145 Cf. the study on differences in the accounts of Otho's life in Craig S. Keener, "Otho: A Targeted Comparison of Suetonius's Biography and Tacitus's History, with Implications for the Gospels' Historical Reliability," *BBR* 21.3 (2011): 331–55; and Michael R. Licona, "Compositional Techniques within Plutarch and the Gospel Tradition," in *Christian Origins and the Establishment of the Early Jesus Movement*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 134–48. Keener's focus is to demonstrate the degree of variance allowable in the genre of ancient biography and Licona infers several compositional techniques that help explain the variance in biographical accounts of the same event; the cataloguing of differences and similarities in biographical accounts is prerequisite to raising and answering questions of historical authenticity (see chapter 4).

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Are the criteria of authenticity of Jesus research idiosyncratic to New Testament studies, vehicles of subjectivity, and fundamentally flawed vestiges of form criticism as some claim today? If so, why do opponents of the criteria-approach still use them? Or, are the criteria the tools of general historiography as others assert? If true, none have adequately demonstrated where and how principles such as multiple attestation, general and historical coherence, dissimilarity and embarrassment feature in general historiographic method—until now. This study analyzes the methods of general historians and Jesus researchers (who favor or oppose the criteria) and demonstrates that, regardless of sub-discipline, authenticating criteria are inherent to the practice of historiography.

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At a time in which some New Testament scholars want to abolish the use of the criteria of authenticity, Burr shows that professional historians have been making use of these criteria for over a century. This volume should serve as a caution to the naysayers and at least move them to reconsider their position.

– Michael Licona, Ph.D. (University of Pretoria), Professor of New Testament Studies, Houston Christian University

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